STREET SPIRIT

Volume 20, No. 4 April 2014 Donation: $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

The Visionary Folk Art of Leon Kennedy

by Terry Messman



Leon Kennedy's painting of Rosa Parks depicts the unconquerable spirit of one woman who took a stand. Art by Leon Kennedy

Oakland artist Leon Kennedy's iconic painting of Rosa Parks captures the historic legacy of the civil rights movement by depicting the courageous spirit of one woman who took a stand for an entire people.

Kennedy is a visionary folk artist who lives in Oakland now, but he was born in the South in 1945, 10 years before Rosa Parks was arrested for civil disobedience in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, after refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger.

"If kids want to know about their history, they need to know about Rosa Parks," Kennedy said in a recent interview while discussing his imaginative paintings on display at St. Mary's Center in Oakland.

"I was from the South and she's like a role model to me and to many people. She took a stand for Black people."

"Now I take a stand in my artwork," Kennedy added, explaining that his art is a way of honoring the courage and commitment of Rosa Parks and so many others who took a stand for justice and freedom.

One act of resistance can trigger another in a chain reaction, so the initial moment of inspiration is passed from person to person down through the decades. That is why the legacy of the Freedom Movement reverberates to this day, and inspired an artist in Oakland 60 years after Parks took a quiet stand of conscience on a bus in Alabama.

Leon Kennedy's portrayal of her determined and unconquerable spirit is an artist's way of passing the legacy of Rosa Parks on to a new generation. "I am learning from people who have gone before me in history and have inspired me," he said.

Kennedy also painted a huge, mural-sized tribute to African American women from many fields who contributed to American history. The women he profiled are "helping their people get to the Promised Land," he said. The painting includes actresses Dorothy Dandridge and Cecily Tyson, activists Angela Davis and Rosa Parks, and many others.

"These women dreamed their dreams and their dreams came true," Kennedy said. His painting was inspired by the book, *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America.*

Showing the beauty of life

In an interview with *Street Spirit,* Kennedy said that when he begins to paint a person, he tries to show their beauty. "Life is beautiful and my art is a way to show this beauty," he explained.

When he creates art, he wants to show people something more than they may be able to see in themselves — something beautiful, something positive in their life.

Art critics refer to Kennedy as a "spiritual visionary artist" and a "modern American master." His paintings are highly original, with imaginative, eye-catching designs, a beautiful, vivid use of color and a dramatic sense of composition. One critic recently wrote that "Kennedy is a painter's painter" with a "Van Gogh color sensibility" and "beautiful figuration."

Above all, Kennedy is a spiritual artist who declares his faith openly and without apology despite the prevalent cynicism of the modern era, and without concession to the secular sophistication of the art world.

"My inspiration and imagination come from God," he said. "Love is the most important thing in life and the message I show is that God is Love."

His art is rooted in the deep reservoirs of faith in the African American community, and he explains that his paintings radiate God's love to others. "My message is the spirit of God and the spirit of the black community," he said.

Kennedy said he has been especially inspired and influenced by his minister, Rev. Kevin D. Barnes, pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Oakland.

'Like going to church'

Kathy McCarthy, a staff member at St. Mary's, is so moved by the spiritual message at the heart of Kennedy's art that she describes it as like going to church.

In an interview, McCarthy said, "I love Leon's art. It is so spiritual. It is so uplifting. It brings me into the Holy Spirit and the light that we all need to have. And it is so colorful. Because of the intense color and the feeling that you get when you see his art, it's like going to church."

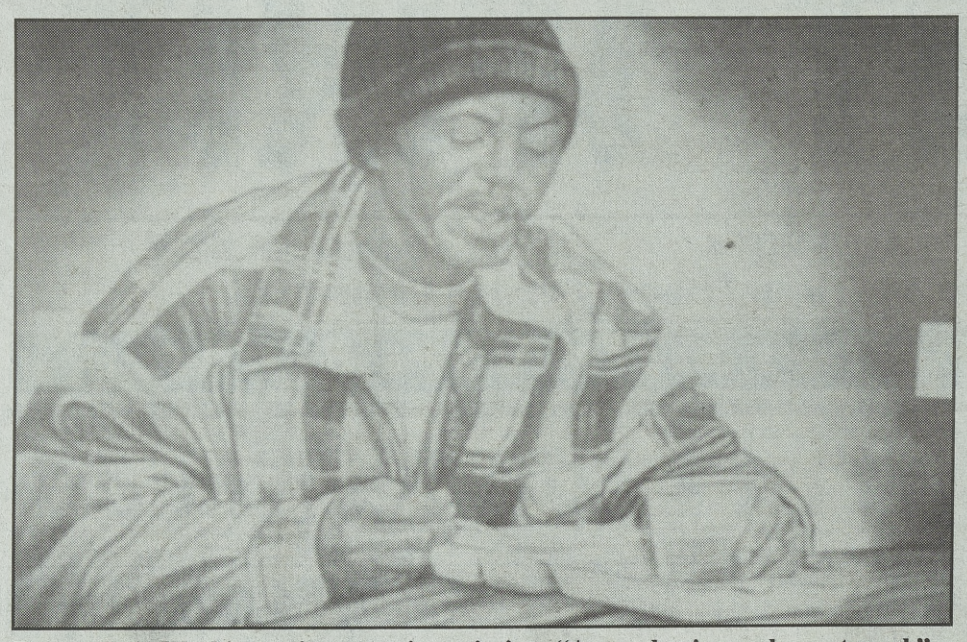
Leon Kennedy's art has been displayed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Collection de l'Art Brut in Switzerland, Lowell Revolving Museum, American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, African American Museum in Dallas, Redux Gallery in Alameda, and

See **Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy** *page 6*



Oakland artist Leon Kennedy shows his painting, "Fellowship with One Another," an iconic image of communion and table fellowship. Susan Werner photo

Human Face of Homelessness at Expressions Gallery



Roosevelt A. Washington's expressive painting: "A man having a pleasant meal."



Tiphereth Banks beautiful artwork shows the deep love between a woman and dog.

"Tiphereth makes the point that pets are very important to homeless people. It's the love of their life. It's the one thing that they feel is loyal to them and is truthful and is really there for them." — Rinna Flohr, Expressions Gallery

by Terry Messman

Expressions Gallery in Berkeley is displaying dozens of paintings, photographs and artworks in its "Homelessness" exhibit that runs until April 18. The exhibit is a collaboration between Expressions Gallery and two homeless service providers in the East Bay, St. Mary's Center and BOSS.

When I first learned about this exhibit, I was more than a little skeptical with all the talk of "outsider art" and do-gooder art patrons who want to vicariously experience the urban nightmare of homelessness through the safe vantage point of artists who have created decorative artworks out of anguish and poverty.

The very idea of a gallery serving the whims of upper-middle-class art patrons by hosting an exhibit that transforms human beings into art objects seemed alienating. I recalled how Richard List, a Berkeley artist who actually had been homeless, once protested a museum's frou-frou photographic display of homelessness by standing next to the framed photos of suffering human beings with a frame around his face. As art patrons approached, they found that one of the images of homeless people stared right back at them through the frame. List's point was that human beings should not be objectified due to poverty, nor reduced to an aesthetic experience.

And that exhibit took place in a bona fide museum, not anything as bourgeois or commercial as an art gallery.

Preconceptions Blown Away

Yet, on March 26, several artists from St. Mary's Center in Oakland — artists I care about — were speaking at a panel on homelessness and art, so I reluctantly entered the doors of Expressions Gallery at 2035 Ashby Avenue in Berkeley to listen to a panel discussion — and very quickly had all my preconceptions and doubts blown away.

I was overwhelmed by the deeply moving paintings, drawings, photographs and sculptures. Scores of fascinating artworks on the theme of urban poverty covered every wall in every room of the gallery. I hadn't realized that the entire art gallery had been turned over to a study of homelessness in all its forms, and it was unexpectedly moving to see how many thoughtful artists, both homeless and housed, had devoted so much of their creativity and skill to bringing the hidden world of homelessness to light.

In a society that rejects and scorns homeless people and passes cruel laws to drive them out of sight, Expressions Gallery almost felt like a welcoming sanctuary — and one of the few places in Berkeley where homeless people were not banished, but made visible.

Aesthetic considerations aside, the Homelessness exhibit is an inventive way of breaking through our society's denial of homelessness. On the streets outside the Expressions Gallery, Berkeley police have harassed homeless people for years, and politicians have tried to drive them into the ground by enacting ordinances to criminalize them. By contrast, inside the walls of Expressions Gallery, homeless artists and homeless people were welcomed, and the posters of artist Doug Minkler were on display, denouncing the Berkeley Measure S campaign to pass the sitting ban that would have criminalized homeless people throughout the city.

Expressions Gallery not only welcomed homeless people inside to attend the panel discussion, but also championed the work of homeless artists. Out of 60 artists represented in the exhibit, the paintings of 21 homeless artists were on display, a testimony to the welcoming spirit of Expressions Gallery, and evidence of the impressive outreach the gallery staff made to artists on the street.

The Artists Speak Out

As part of this welcoming spirit, the panel on March 26 consisted, not of professional artists or university professors from the fine arts department, but six artists from St. Mary's Center who create their art in a center that shelters and serves meals to homeless and low-income seniors in Oakland. The artists from St. Mary's who spoke about their experience of creating art are Rodney Bell, Ron Clark, Pedro del Norte, Leon Kennedy, Emmett McCuiston and Elizabeth Teal.

The panelists thoughtfully described their struggles to create art while living on the streets, in shelters, or in low-rent SRO (single room occupancy) hotels. These artists have overcome hardships that could have eroded their will to live, and have gone on to create art that dispels all the stereotypes about homelessness — art that is a gift to a society that has too often ignored and disowned them.

Each artist displayed an image or painting they had created as part of St. Mary's art program. Rodney Bell shared the story behind his creation of "Homelessness Has Faces," an artwork that challenges the dehumanizing way he was treated in a homeless shelter. The shelter erased his basic humanity, and treated him like a faceless non-person. Art enabled him to reclaim his identity.

Ron Clark had two thought-provoking pieces on display. His drawing of a slumped and depressed-looking homeless man was entitled, "Standing in the Shadows of Love." Clark used the title of a classic Motown recording by the Four Tops to describe the friendless existence of a man abandoned in the shadows.

Clark, a talented artist who lived in St. Mary's winter shelter in 2013, asked a powerful spiritual question in a politically charged artwork: "How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?"

The Tour Was a Work of Art

One other major inspiration was in store for us that afternoon when our large group from St. Mary's Center was given a tour of all the artworks on display by Rinna Flohr, founder and director of the Expressions Gallery.

Her tour was a work of art itself. Flohr was sensitive, compassionate and politically outspoken, absolutely nailing it when she described how many of the artworks are a scathing indictment of the gap between the rich and the poor.

As Flohr led us from painting to drawing to sculpture, it became even more clearly evident that these artworks are a beautiful testament to the creativity and determination of homeless artists, and the caring and depth of feeling that non-homeless artists have expressed about the injustice of poverty and inequality.

Rinna Flohr's discussion of the art was the best part of the visit. She proved to be highly knowledgeable about the political and social issues of homelessness, and sounded more like a homeless advocate than a gallery director in her outspoken defense of the human rights of the homeless community. *Support this art gallery!*

She explained that the idea of holding a gallery exhibit of homeless-related art came about when a man walked into Expressions Gallery one day and showed her a drawing he had made on a crumpled paper bag. The man was homeless and he asked her, "Can you sell this for me so I can have something to eat?"

Flohr was moved by this appeal, and was highly impressed by his art. She said, "I looked at the drawing and it was fantastic, it really was. But I told him I can't sell it for you because I run a gallery and I have a responsibility to show things that are on archival paper or on canvas."

She told the man that she would be glad to show his art in the gallery if he could put it on canvas.

"But it just wasn't possible and I never saw him again," Flohr said. "He's got no money for food, so how can he get money for archival paper and for frames and all that kind of stuff? Or even where does he have to paint or draw? Because there's no place to do that or to store it."

A few days later, another homeless man came into the gallery and showed her a painting he had done on a large piece of found cardboard. Even though he only had access to the same kind of paints that housepainters use, his art impressed her.

"He had done this absolutely amazing job of abstract work," Flohr said. Once again, she was disappointed at not being able to sell or display his work. Those two encounters with homeless artists were what triggered the Homelessness exhibit.

"We finally figured out there's got to be a way to help homeless people show their work and be known as artists, and

See **Faces of Homelessness** *page 10*

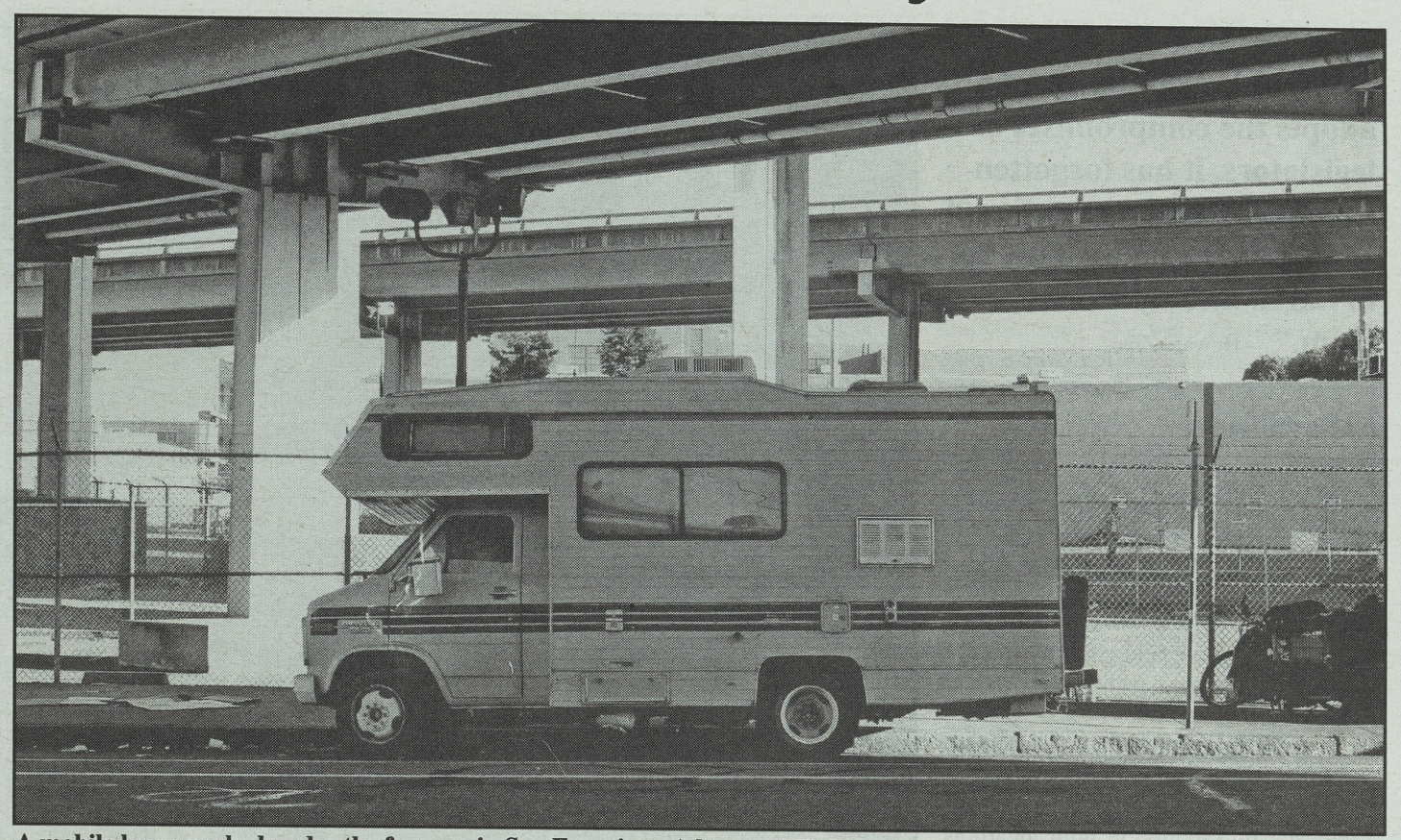
Vacancy

by Joan Clair

How can we be housed
and sleep at night
when our brothers have no homes?
How can we be housed
and sleep at night
when our sisters sleep on stones?
What happened to the home
we shared inside God's heart?
Whatever drove that home to vacancy
drove us apart.

Campers Will Be Driven Out by Van Ban

by TJ Johnston



A mobile home parked under the freeway in San Francisco. A ban on RVs has recently been expanded. Brian Brophy photo

The world just got smaller for Melodie. The streets where she can park her RV, which has also been her home for six years, are now fewer and farther between because a year-old ban on oversized vehicles has been expanded to more neighborhoods throughout San Francisco.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's board of directors approved the expansion on March 4, 2014. In 2013, a pilot program was enacted, prohibiting vehicles longer than 22 feet or higher than seven feet from on-street parking from midnight to 6 a.m.

Ostensibly, the program was intended to exclude commercial vehicles from residential areas, but SFMTA project manager Andy Thorley admitted that only half of the oversize vehicles could be described as commercial.

Advocates from the Coalition on Homelessness and allied groups said the measure would drive away people who live in their RVs or vans, or risk citations and impoundment.

The ban would add 61 new locations, covering about 10 miles of street space, and it would take effect once "no parking" signs are posted. Aides from Supervisors Katy Tang and London Breed's offices spoke before the board endorsing the plan. However, those from Jane Kim and David Campos' offices — opponents of the initial ban — were absent, even after contact by the Coalition on Homelessness.

Melodie, who is 55 and goes by just one name, spoke out against the ban's expansion — and its consequent penalization on vehicular residents — at the March 4 meeting.

"I understand (the SFMTA) did not plan to extend the number of streets for oversize vehicle restrictions," she told the board. "I assure you I do not want to break the law."

In an interview after the board's decision, Melodie, who suffers from traumatic brain injury, said the need to be constantly vigilant for police officers serving 72-hour warnings exerts physical and emotional strain on auto dwellers.

"We can't get rest and are perpetually stressed," she said. "This enforcement feels like terrorism, and I haven't done anything wrong." She added that people living in their vehicles do not have the luxury of getting their lives in order in time to keep in compliance with the law.

Melodie recalled that officers last year did not even wait before the initial ban took effect, demanding that she move her RV. Also, she said the tires on her camper were sabotaged by officers, while she was inside.

Nick Kamura, a Coalition volunteer, said the resulting migration of vehicularly housed people after the ban's initial phase signifies a failure in homeless policy.

"In my mind, this is displacement," he said. "It's just not getting to the root of the problem, and the problem is people living in their vehicles, and they're being criminalized for it."

The city is also seeing more folks making homes of their rides. According to last year's homeless survey, 13 percent of people without housing, or about 120 people, report sleeping in their cars, trucks, vans and campers. That represented a jump from 2011, when 3 percent — some 30 people — said they camped in their vehicles. The figures could actually be higher than the city's estimates because the biennial tally is regarded as an undercount, according to the homeless advocacy community.

Vehicularly housed people risk their wheeled homes being confiscated if unpaid citations pile up. Their vehicles are often the last line of support before living on the streets or in shelters, and Melodie fears enforcement will put car dwellers on the fast track to homelessness.

"There is a frightening thoroughness and deliberateness that terrifies me," she said. "Everything depends on the humanity of the police and meter maids. Because we have no rights, everything can be taken away from us."

Phone in to Reserve Shelter Beds in S.F.

Homeless people may use the 311 telephone system to reserve a bed for up to 90 days, using a unique identifying number to determine their spot on a waiting list.

by TJ Johnston

A long-awaited change in the provision of shelter services in San Francisco started taking place recently so homeless people won't have to wait in line to use them. After a year and a half of meetings between city officials, service providers and homeless advocates on how to reform the emergency shelter system, the San Francisco Human Services Agency unveiled the centerpiece of their collective efforts.

Homeless people may use the 311 telephone system to reserve a bed for up to 90 days, using a unique identifying number to determine their spot on a waitlist, and be notified with a voice or text message. They would then have 10 days to call 311 and accept the reservation.

The agency estimates that the homeless database known as CHANGES has 6,000 profiles of clients vying for 1,139 shelter beds in the city on any given night.

Since Feb. 15, 2014, when the new system went live, 128 reservations were placed in the first three days, said Scott Walton, manager of the agency's adult homeless and housing division. Assigned 90-day reservations began on February 24.

This method aims to move homeless people away from lining up at resource centers before they open — sometimes by sleeping outside overnight. It would eliminate the advantage people at the front of the line would have, according to a memo from the mayor's office on homelessness, and could also prevent conflicts over where people's places are in line.

Amanda Kahn Fried, deputy director of the mayor's homeless policy office, said it would also ease people who find it physically challenging to wait in line.

"The system was designed to make it easier for people to access shelter — particularly people with disabilities," she said. "A case worker can certainly assist someone to sign up through 311, provided they are already in CHANGES and have a current TB test."

Gwendolyn Westbrook, executive director of the United Council of Human Services, the Bayview District-based drop-in center also known as "Mother Brown's," said she looked forward to the system launch, anticipating that beds will go to clients faster as a result. Last year, Mother Brown's drew attention from the media over clients having to spend the night in chairs at the drop-in.

"I think it was a well-thought-out process," she said. "I hope more people go into Mother Brown's for a 90-day bed."

But Jennifer Friedenbach, director of the Coalition on Homelessness, pointed out in a January 30 letter to the mayor's office that people with a current 90-day reservation can't get on the waitlist until they no longer have access to a bed, whether it's from expiration of the term or a denial of service.

Originally, during a series of shelter access workgroup meetings, stakeholders agreed that reservation holders shouldn't be shut out of the waitlist because they might need more than reservation's allotted 120 days — 90 plus an automatic 30-day extension — to secure housing.

Community members were concerned this would force people out of shelter for extended periods of time between each stay, causing further destabilization. City officials had originally said it is not fair for a newly homeless person to be behind someone already in shelter on the list.

"We understand there is an issue of equity accessing 90-day reservations, but we feel going through the process once is equalizer enough," Friedenbach wrote.

Her point was that if people could get on wait list again while in shelter, it would mean everyone would have a longer wait to get in initially, but once they were in, would be able to repeat stays if needed.

The Coalition also suggested speeding the process by dedicating an option on 311 to shelter reservations. Prompts on the system ask users to press 1 for Muni service and 2 for all other services, which range from licenses for pets to graffiti removal to sidewalk maintenance.

Reservation centers now have phone lines directly connected to the 311 system and post the assigned ID numbers online at sf311.org/waitlist.

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **J.C. Orton.**

Editor, Layout: Terry Messman
Web designer: Jesse Clarke

Contributors: Selam Aberra, David Bacon, Tiphereth Banks, Rodney Bell, Sandow Birk, Jack Bragen, Brian Brophy, Jonathan Burstein, Lynda Carson, Joan Clair, Alex Darocy, Todd Huffman, T.J. Johnston, Leon Kennedy, Peter Marin, Steve Pleich, Roosevelt A. Washington, Susan Werner, George Wynn

All works copyrighted by the authors. The views expressed in *Street Spirit* articles are those of the individual authors, not necessarily those of the AFSC.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos.
***Contact*: Terry Messman**
Street Spirit, 65 Ninth Street,
San Francisco, CA 94103
***E-mail*: spirit@afsc.org**
***Web:* http://www.thestreetspirit.org**

Contact *Street Spirit* Vendor Coordinator

The *Street Spirit* vendor program is managed by J.C. Orton.

If you have questions about the vendor program, please e-mail J.C. Orton at noscw@sbcglobal.net or call his cell phone at (510) 684-1892. His mailing address is J.C. Orton, P.O. Box 13468, Berkeley, CA 94712-4468.

How Change Happens: The Immigration Uprising

"When a social movement adopts the compromises of legislators, it has forgotten its role, which is to push and challenge the politicians, not to fall in meekly behind them." —Howard Zinn

by David Bacon

Two weeks ago, hundreds of people inside the Tacoma Detention Center launched a hunger strike against its private operator, Geo Corporation, demanding better conditions and a moratorium on deportations. Activists, who have held vigils outside the center for years, now gather every day to support those inside.

A week later, the strike spread to another Geo facility in Texas. According to Maru Mora Villapando of Latino Advocacy in Tacoma, in both locations the company has isolated the strikers and, in Tacoma, threatened to force-feed them.

This is only the most dramatic action of a wave of activity around the country, in which community and labor activists, and now deportees themselves, have refused to quietly endure increased immigration enforcement.

They are mostly young, deriving much of their inspiration from the Dreamers who forced the administration two years ago to begin providing legal status to some of those who would otherwise be deported. These activists refuse to wait for Congress to enact its immigration reform proposals, and in fact many reject them as fatally compromised. Instead, they're organizing actions on the ground to win rights and equality.

In Tucson, San Francisco, Phoenix, Chicago and other cities, people sat down in front of ICE buses and vans, and chained themselves to vehicles, to block deportations.

In Tucson, they stopped the Operation Streamline anti-immigrant court, which every day sentences dozens of young border crossers, brought before a judge in chains, to months in prison.

Supervisors in Los Angeles and San Francisco passed resolutions demanding a moratorium on the huge wave of deportations — two million people in five years. The San Francisco resolution also demanded an end to the tens of thousands of immigration-related firings.

Ju Hong, a young immigrant whose deportation was deferred in the White House's executive action two years ago, challenged President Obama at a West Coast fundraiser, telling him, "You have the power to stop deportations."

In Burlington, Washington, immigrant indigenous farm workers from Oaxaca went on strike repeatedly last year for labor rights, better pay, and to stop a grower from using the H2A guest worker program to replace them.

In Jackson, Mississippi, immigrant rights activists helped elect a radical African-American mayor. Their broad coalition defeated a wave of state anti-immigrant bills, as they have in every session of the state legislature for years.

This growing insurgency is a direct response to the fact that the Obama administration, like the Bush administration before it, has implemented the harshest parts of Congress' immigration reform proposals, even while Congress has been paralyzed and unable to pass them.

Hundreds of thousands are deported every year. Tens of thousands more are fired from their jobs simply because they're undocumented. The number of contract guest workers brought to the United States at low wages and reduced labor rights is growing. One report, Visas, Inc. put the number at 900.000 last year.



Immigrants, workers, union members, people of faith and community activists demonstrate in front of the Mi Pueblo market in East Palo Alto, California, calling for a moratorium on deportations and on the firing of undocumented workers because of their immigration status. David Bacon photo

The Washington disconnect is breathtaking. While increasing enforcement, the administration insists on a new trade treaty, the Trans Pacific Partnership, guaranteed to cause more poverty in other countries, leading to yet more undocumented migration.

And instead of debating this consequence openly, the administration wants a "fast track" process that would prohibit Congress from even discussing this impact. That's hardly a surprise, since a debate would reveal that the North American Free Trade Agreement, adopted 20 years ago, led to the forced migration of eight million people from Mexico.

It is no wonder that anger in immigrant and working-class communities is growing, and with it the actions that challenge these enforcement and labor broker policies on the ground. Yet some voices in Washington continue to insist that Congress take a vote on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) bills, claiming they would bring a progressive change in U.S. immigration policy.

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform strategy has always been based on a dangerous trade-off. Immigrant communities are promised some kind of legalization, which gets more and more limited with every proposal. In the last bills, S 744 and HR 15, possibly half the undocumented population would fail to meet all the requirements in the tortuous and lengthy legalization process, or simply refuse to come forward.

In exchange for this, communities and unions must agree to increased enforcement — escalating militarization of the border and greater repression in workplaces — and expansion of guest worker programs.

Employers see immigration policy as a way to satisfy their desire for workers at the lowest possible wages, with the fewest possible rights. Whether they're looking for farm workers, construction workers or high tech workers, their objective is to ensure that wages go down as workers compete for increasingly insecure jobs.

This CIR strategy, therefore, trades immigrants' civil and labor rights, including those of the braceros employers want, for the legalization of some of the undocumented. Leaving aside its morality, even as a practical strategy it's proven to be unsuccessful. For the third time — 2006, 2009, and now 2013-4 — the tradeoff tactic has been unable to deliver progressive change.

Punitive immigration enforcement, more guest workers and a new free trade agreement are no solution to the problems facing immigrants and working people. It is long past time to move away from the Comprehensive Immigration Reform approach.

The activists who are organizing widespread protest actions are fighting the impact of anti-immigrant policies, while at the same time they point to deeper and better solutions. When people stand in front of the buses, or go on hunger strikes to protest firings and deportations, they are calling for something fundamental —- the right to live as equals in this country, as full participants with rights.

A powerful, principled movement, based on the efforts taking place on the ground, cannot only challenge existing policies, but can win a new and better bill.

This is the lesson of the civil rights movement. That movement sought more than legislation, although it eventually produced two of the country's most important laws — the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts.

But it won those laws by organizing people for change where they lived — in their communities and workplaces — and because it fought for equality on the ground. It resisted the pressure to compromise for anything less, and grew so large and strong it forced Congress to pass legislation that embodied its demands.

Despite pressure from Washington to line up behind the CIR bills, many groups have advocated alternatives, including the American Friends Service Committee, the Dignity Campaign, the Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana and many local unions and labor councils.

There is growing agreement among them that in order to halt the deportations and detention quotas, end employer sanctions and workplace enforcement programs, and protect family-based migration instead of low-wage labor schemes, we have to change the way we think about immigration reform.

An alternative based on rights would offer permanent residence status quickly to all the undocumented, with a clear path to citizenship for those who want to exercise political rights. It would increase the number of family visas while ending guest worker programs — the humanistic vision of the 1965 immigration act that passed at the height of the civil rights movement.

It would end mass deportations and huge, privately run detention centers, and enforce labor rights instead of firing workers because they don't have papers. It would end the militarization of the border and restore civil rights in border communities and friendship with those on the other side. And it would stop new trade agreements and renegotiate old ones, like NAFTA, to prevent them from causing poverty and dislocation.

Figuring out the alternative isn't really the hard part. It's building a movement strong enough to force Congress and the administration to enact it. But this is possible, as our own history tells us.

Historian Howard Zinn warned: "When a social movement adopts the compromises of legislators, it has forgotten its role, which is to push and challenge the politicians, not to fall in meekly behind them."

Zinn believed people have the power to win radical demands. "If there is going to be change, real change," he said, "it will have to work its way from the bottom up, from the people themselves. That's how change happens."

For more information on these issues, see the following books by David Bacon:

The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration (Beacon Press).

Illegal People — How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants (Beacon Press).

Corporate Takeover of Berkeley's Public Housing

by Lynda Carson

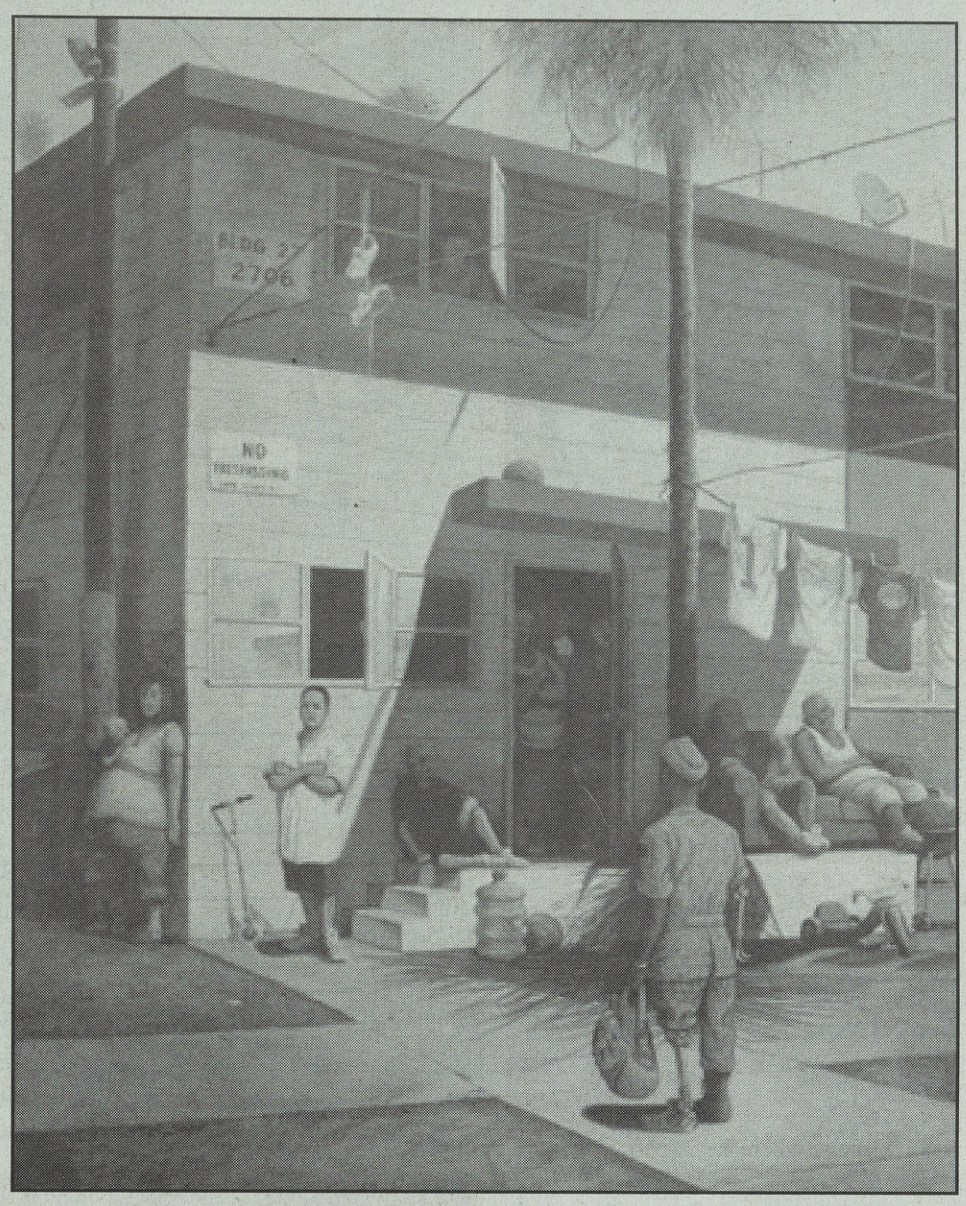
According to the Berkeley Housing Authority (BHA), a notice was sent on February 11, 2014, to all of Berkeley's public housing residents advising them of the transfer of ownership of their public housing units to the Related Company, owned by billionaires Jorge M. Perez and Stephen M. Ross. Seemingly, this effectively concluded the BHA's project to privatize and dispose of Berkeley's 75 public housing townhouses.

However, the deal to privatize public housing in Berkeley became a lot more complicated as of March 17, 2014, when Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, filed a civil rights lawsuit in federal court against the Related Companies, Inc., for engaging in a pattern and practice of developing rental apartments that are inaccessible to persons with disabilities in New York City, and elsewhere.

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said, "We will not allow developers and architects who deprive people with disabilities of accessible housing to evade the consequences of their failure to comply with clear, long-standing federal civil rights laws. When developers demonstrate an unwillingness to design and construct accessible housing in accordance with federal law, this Office will not hesitate to use its enforcement tools to compel the developers to make both their preexisting and future constructions accessible.

"To ensure that RELATED's current and future residential housing developments are accessible to people with disabilities and to redress its history of noncompliance with the Fair Housing Act, the United States seeks a court order enjoining RELATED from designing and constructing multi-family housing, such as 15 Hudson Yards, without the accessibility features required by federal law and requiring RELATED to retrofit the inaccessible conditions at all the rental properties it has developed to make them accessible. The United States also seeks damages for persons harmed by RELATED's unlawful practices, and a civil penalty to vindicate the public interest."

Another strange twist to this story occurred on March 19, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced that it is giving $112,344 to the BHA for maintenance of its public housing units, even though the BHA sold and transferred ownership of all of its public housing units to billionaires Jorge M. Perez and Stephen M. Ross, of the Related Companies, on February 14, 2014._ Now that the BHA has sold all of its public housing units, one can only wonder what the $112,344 is really going to be used for.



"GI Homecoming" Sandow Birk, Oil on Canvas

Meanwhile, current and former Berkeley public housing tenants are speaking up and shedding a little bit of light on what has been happening once the decision was made to privatize and sell their public housing units to out-of-state billionaires Jorge M. Perez and Stephen M. Ross.

Contrary to the claim by the BHA that a notice was sent on February 11 to notify Berkeley's public housing tenants that their homes have been sold to out-of-state billionaires, it appears that not all of the public housing tenants were properly notified about the takeover of their housing.

Kenya Johnson and Francesca Barnett have lived for a number of years at a public housing unit on Russell Street in Berkeley. On March 18, Barnett said, "Where we live there is a duplex and a house located at this property. All three units are still fully occupied with public housing tenants. I live in a two-bedroom unit with my roommate Kenya. There is nothing that I can say about our building being sold. Far as I know, we have not received a notice yet telling us that our home has been sold.

"In fact, around two weeks ago, someone came by and told us that our building has not been sold. I have lived here around a year, and my roommate has lived here for around four years or more. I definitely am under the impression that my home was not sold yet, and that we are still public housing tenants. I am surprised to hear that our housing has been sold if that is the case. We were told that depending on who buys the property, that it will be the deciding factor on what will happen to us. We were advised that we may receive a 30 Day Notice, or a 60 Day Notice telling us that we may have to move somewhere else, when the building is sold. But it depends on who will buy our housing. They do not allow us to have a say in regards to what happens to our public housing."

The February 11, 2014, notice sent to some of Berkeley's public housing tenants from the BHA tells them that their 75 public housing units have been sold to the new ownership entity, Berkeley 75, LP, effective February 14, 2014.

Additionally, the notice tells the tenants that Berkeley 75, LP, will be their new landlord, and that the BHA will no longer have any involvement in their tenancy. The tenants were advised that, beginning on February 14 and continuing through the end of the rehabilitation of their housing units, they can use Section 8 vouchers to move if they decide to do so. The notice did not list a phone number or address telling tenants how they can contact the new owners of their privatized housing units.

Out-of-state billionaires Jorge M. Perez and Stephen M. Ross of The Related Companies took control of Berkeley's public housing units on February 14, in a complicated deal that edged out local nonprofit housing developers. Many of Berkeley's low-income families have become displaced as a direct result of the sell-out of Berkeley's public housing units that originally were supposed to remain as public housing units in perpetuity, when they were built with taxpayer funding.

Former public housing tenant Terry Pete said, "I was pressured out of my public housing around a year ago after living in Berkeley's public housing for much of my life. I was pressured out of my housing and have been made homeless. I had to move in with some of my relatives to avoid living on the streets. I was not given

See **Berkeley Public Housing Sold** *page 11*

U.N. Human Rights Committee Calls Criminalization of Homelessness in the U.S. 'Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading'

A homeless veteran died in jail after being arrested for seeking shelter from sub-freezing temperatures.

by Selam Aberra, National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

Geneva, Switzerland — The U.N. Human Rights Committee in Geneva has condemned the criminalization of homelessness in the United States as "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" that violates international human rights treaty obligations, and called upon the U.S. government to take corrective action.

The Committee's statement is part of its Concluding Observations, following a two-day review of U.S. government compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a treaty ratified in 1992.

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP), which had submitted a report to the Committee as part of the review process, applauded the Committee's findings.

"Criminally punishing people simply for having no legal place to be is cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment to which homeless people across the country are subjected every day," said Maria Foscarinis, NLCHP executive director.

The NLCHP regularly issues reports on the criminalization of homelessness and litigates to challenge the practice. "We welcome the Committee's Concluding Observations and call on our government to take swift action to solve homelessness with homes, not jails and prisons."

NLCHP noted that the Committee's Observations follows last week's reports of the death of Jerome Murdough, a homeless veteran, in an overheated prison cell, following his arrest for trespassing after seeking shelter in an enclosed stairwell of a New York City public housing building during a week of sub-freezing temperatures.

"Jerome Murdough never should have been in jail in the first place," said Eric Tars, Director of Human Rights and Children's Rights Programs at NLCHP. "Despite the recession, our country is still the wealthiest country in the world, and we have the resources to ensure that everyone has a safe place to live. Criminalization is a barbaric approach to homelessness that should be rejected."

"I'm just simply baffled by the idea that people can be without shelter in a country, and then be treated as criminals for being without shelter," said Sir Nigel Rodley, Chairperson of the U.N. Human Rights Committee, in his closing statement on the U.S. review. "The idea of criminalizing people who don't have shelter is something that I think many of my colleagues might find as difficult as I do to even begin to comprehend."

The Committee's Concluding Observations welcomed the positive steps taken by federal and some state and local authorities to address criminalization as a human rights violation, but noted concern that the practice is still routine.

It called on the U.S. government to "engage with state and local authorities to: (a) abolish criminalization of homelessness laws and policies at state and local levels; (b) ensure close cooperation between all relevant stakeholders including social, health, law enforcement and justice professionals at all levels to intensify efforts to find solutions for the homeless in accordance with human rights standards; and (c) offer incentives for decriminalization and implementation of such solutions, including by providing continued financial support to local authorities implementing alternatives to criminalization and withdrawing funding for local authorities criminalizing the homeless."



"Trust God." **A woman lifts her arms up to the blue heavens. This dramatic image of faith has an almost indescribable power and grace.** Artwork by Leon Kennedy



"Father and Son." **Family is a central theme in Kennedy's art.** Art by Leon Kennedy

Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy

"What I've seen him focus on lately is his understanding of 'Love One Another.' It's very important for Leon to show through his art that people need each other." — Susan Werner

from page 1

King's Gallery of the San Francisco Unitarian Universalist Church.

As part of its groundbreaking exhibition of American outsider art, the Smithsonian purchased one of Kennedy's large, mural-like paintings — a fantastically complex series of several dozen portraits painted on a bed sheet. This masterwork now resides at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Kennedy's art was featured in the book, *Contemporary American Folk Art* by Chuck and Jan Rosenak. Rosenak wrote, "Leon Kennedy's paintings — huge mural-like works filled with detailed scenes from black inner-city life — are tapestries taken from his youthful memories of life in a Houston ghetto as well as from what he sees around him in his Oakland neighborhood."

Even though Kennedy's paintings have been displayed locally and internationally in art galleries and museums, his brilliant artworks may have found their truest home at St. Mary's Center in Oakland.

He treasures the many close friendships he has found at St. Mary's, and, in turn, this community of low-income and homeless seniors cherishes Kennedy's striking paintings and iconic images as a reflection of their own deeply held values.

Not only bread, but roses too

St. Mary's Center not only offers low-income and homeless seniors the support they need to survive economically, but also gives them encouragement and a place to express themselves artistically.

Along with providing shelter, meals, benefits counseling and housing referrals, St. Mary's staff members help the seniors express themselves in art, music, dance, photography and creative writing.

Not only bread, but roses too.

Susan Werner, art facilitator at St. Mary's Center, has worked with Leon Kennedy for several years, and has seen his artistry constantly grow and flourish.

"Leon is a humble, soft-spoken man who lives passionately and purposefully as an artist," Werner said. "When he shows his art, he speaks of God's love for all people and the blessing of fellowship."

Kennedy has indeed found fellowship at St. Mary's, where he is part of a community that appreciates his art. One of his works, "Fellowship With One Another," is an iconic image of communion with 15 people gathered around a table, sharing a meal together. Kennedy has painted their table fellowship in the form of a circle, a mandala, a symbol of unity in community.

The beauty of faces

Community is a central part of Kennedy's vision of life, as shown in his painting, "Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself." Kennedy explains that his art stems from his love for humanity, and he especially loves to paint the faces of the people that matter most to him, his close friends and family and neighbors.

"I love to see a picture of the beauty of old faces, young faces," he said. "All colors, everyone has their own beauty. Everyone has character, and everyone goes through something."

Susan Werner has seen the artist's growing focus on creating art that expresses love for one another. "Leon's always been using real life and real people and our connection to one another as his theme," Werner said. "Originally, some of the images were very focused on that direct connection with God and praising God and worshipping together. What I've seen him focus on lately is his understanding of 'Love One Another.' So now there's a lot more images about love and relationships between people. It's very important for Leon to show through his art that people need each other."

At first glance, Kennedy's painting, "Love Thy Neighbor," is a fairly straightforward portrait of the faces of his friends, his Oakland neighbors, and his community members at St. Mary's Center.

A second look reveals something startling and surreal and even disorienting. In the dreamlike perspective of Kennedy's painting, the laws of time and space — and even mortality — are suspended, so his real-life neighbors co-exist simultaneously with long-departed elders and historical figures such as Nelson Mandela.

The artist's present-day friends at St. Mary's Center are magically juxtaposed with Dr. Martin Luther King — who died 46 years ago — and with Kennedy's own mother, Ella Mae Kennedy — dearly loved but no longer among the living.



"From Our Heart." **In this bright-red vision, two women create a heart-shaped outline as they join together in giving thanks.** Art by Leon Kennedy

The art of resurrection

It is a stunning effect, the casual, matter-of-fact way in which Kennedy's living friends are portrayed right next to long-gone elders and assassinated civil rights leaders — and no one seems at all surprised by the miracle of resurrection in their midst.

In Leon's vision, even death does not shatter the bonds of love and community. It's nothing less than an announcement of resurrection from an artist whose faith is so interwoven with his life that he never doubts for a second the soul's ongoing life after death.

At the heart of Kennedy's artistry is his belief that love is the living connection between all of us. That is why he has chosen to paint the people he loves and cherishes. And that is why the painting is entitled, "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself."

His artwork is more than a series of faces. It is an exhortation to love one another, and to cherish the lives of our friends and families and neighbors. His painting is a reminder that love for others is the most important spiritual value of all.

Kennedy said, "We all are family. We connect to each other. My work is based on community and family, and I love doing the faces and showing the heart and love. The heart of the community — you call it love. I have God's love and God's spirit and passion for people. Each person is an expression of God within. Each one is blessed in different ways."

The blessing of beauty

Kennedy's art has been especially important in giving the blessing of beauty and hope to many of the homeless members of St. Mary's community who have endured a great deal of personal hardships and suffering while living on the street. Kennedy's art tells them that they are not alone in their pain and sorrow.

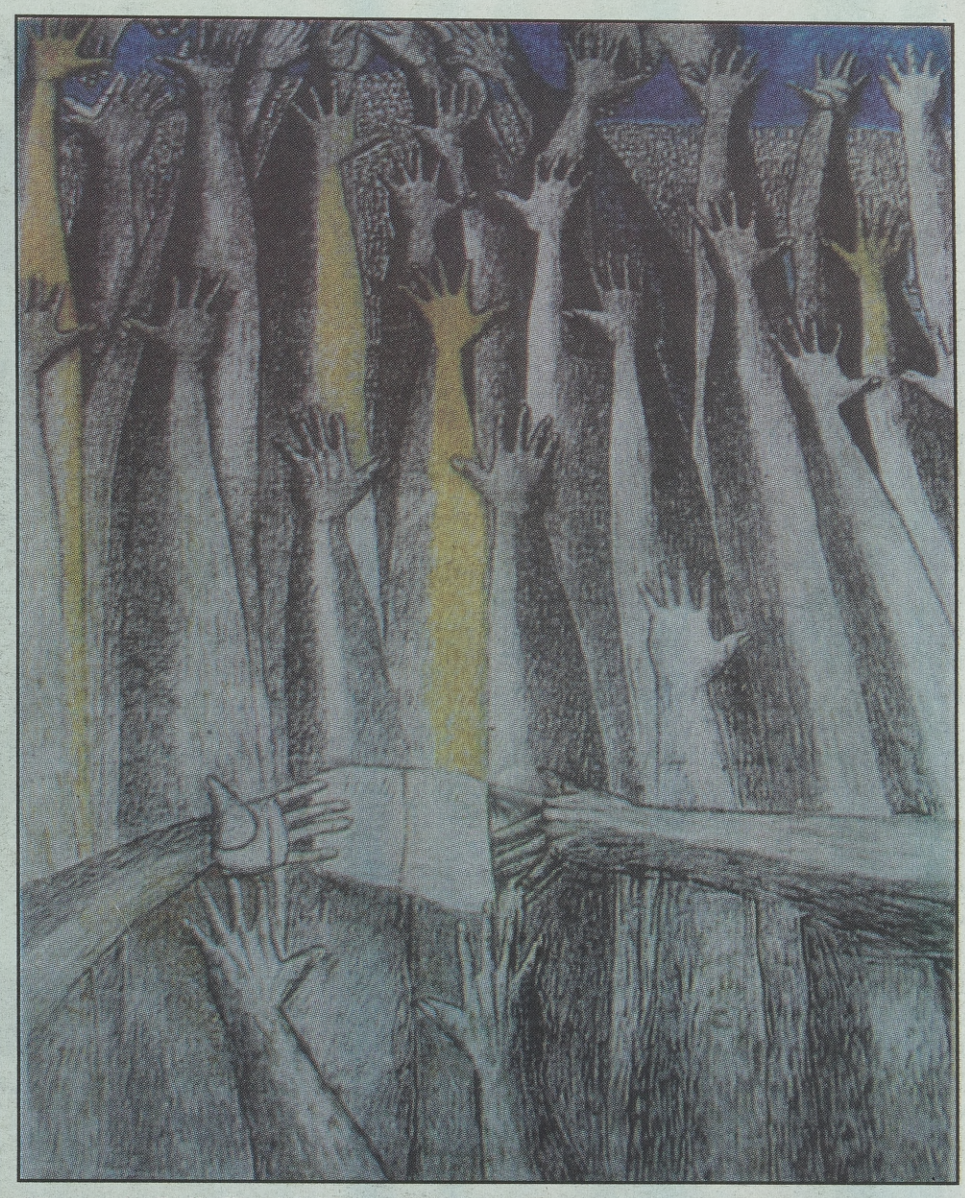
St. Mary's staff member Kathy McCarthy said, "We're all so isolated and separated, and need to remember we all feel the same pain, have the same sorrows, and the same joys. We are part of each other and we *are* each other."

Art and beauty and love and friendship are no less important than food and shelter in welcoming people "who come to St.

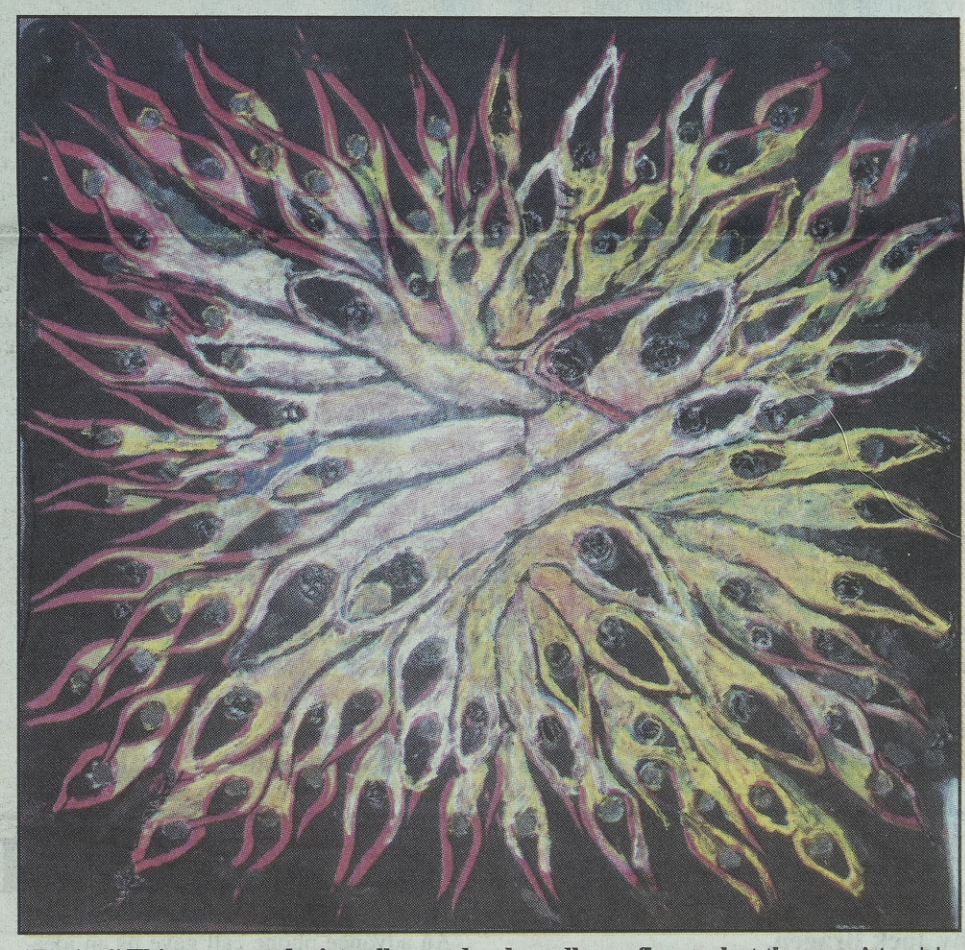
See **Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy** *page 7*



"God don't move my mountain, but give me the strength to climb." Art by Leon Kennedy



***"Destiny in God's Hands."* Multitudes of hands are uplifted in prayer. This work reflects the artist's belief that our destiny is in God's hands.** Artwork by Leon Kennedy



***"Praise."* This seems to depict yellow and red candles or flames, but the "flames" are actually human figures with their arms uplifted in praise.** Artwork by Leon Kennedy

Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy

"I love to see a picture of the beauty of old faces, young faces, all colors. Everyone has their own beauty. Everyone has character, and everyone goes through something." — Leon Kennedy

from page 6

Mary's Center impacted by harsh circumstances," according to McCarthy. It enables people who have endured the hostility and dangers of the streets to "see the beauty, light and presence of something greater than all of us," she said.

SERVING ONE ANOTHER

It is profoundly important for Leon Kennedy that his art serves the community. His greatest mission as an artist is to express the love for one another that is at the very heart of all religion.

"The main idea of my art is concern for people, encouraging someone else," he said. "I love when someone loves the work, and feels touched. We're here to serve and love and encourage one another. When I get a vision, I hope it helps someone."

Living on the streets of Oakland can be difficult and frightening. Many are driven to despair by the constant hardships and cruelty they face. Many feel abandoned by everyone, and give up on the hope of ever again finding love and a better life.

Kennedy sees his art as an attempt to bring love and faith to those who feel broken and lost. He constantly works to create art that may give new hope to people living only a step or two away from despair and poverty.

He has been greatly influenced by his minister, Pastor Kevin Barnes. "I learn so much listening to my pastor," Kennedy said. "He encourages people to make a difference in other people's lives. He says to share one's talents to help someone. He and I would agree we're here to make the world a better place to live."

HIS ART IS FOR EVERYONE

Leon's art is meant to encourage homeless people forced to live on the streets. His art is for African Americans who have overcome oppression and poverty, and have found lasting hope in their community's historic struggle for justice. His art is for everyone.

"My work deals with the endless struggle and the Black man's fight to be free," he said. "Today, my work is more spiritual than political. It conveys love and unity. I try to reach the truth and light that is within each of us."

Leon strongly emphasizes that his vision of community is inclusive. His artwork, "Love Thy Neighbor," portrays the multiracial diversity of Oakland. His African American family and friends, his white friends and his Chinese neighbor from down the block are all joined together as one on the canvas of Kennedy's visionary imagination.

"Every day I know what I am going to do," Kennedy said. "I'm going to inspire somebody. I have a positive attitude. Love is at the center. My ideas come from God. Like Martin Luther King, I focus on being with God and doing his will. All my art is from God. I go within, and the gift comes from God. I am a servant of God and hope to be a blessing for whomever I contact."

FINDING HIS CALLING

"As a child I knew that art was my vocation," Kennedy said. He was born in 1945 in Houston, Texas, and moved to the Bay Area in 1965. "I paint memories of my inner-city life in Houston as a youth and of urban scenes in Oakland where I currently live."

The budding young artist began by painting huge, mural-sized scenes from his childhood memories of life on the streets in the poor part of Houston. The self-taught artist next began painting scenes he observed around him in Oakland.

His art often reveals his spirituality and his gratitude for his blessings. "My message," he said, "is the sprit of God and the spirit of the black community."

"My work is an affirmation of faith, love and charity in my life," he said. "That is what we need most in our community. Love is most important in life and the message I show is that God is Love."

In Oakland, the folk artist began painting on cloth, but he soon ran out of canvas, so he started painting on bed sheets and other found materials.

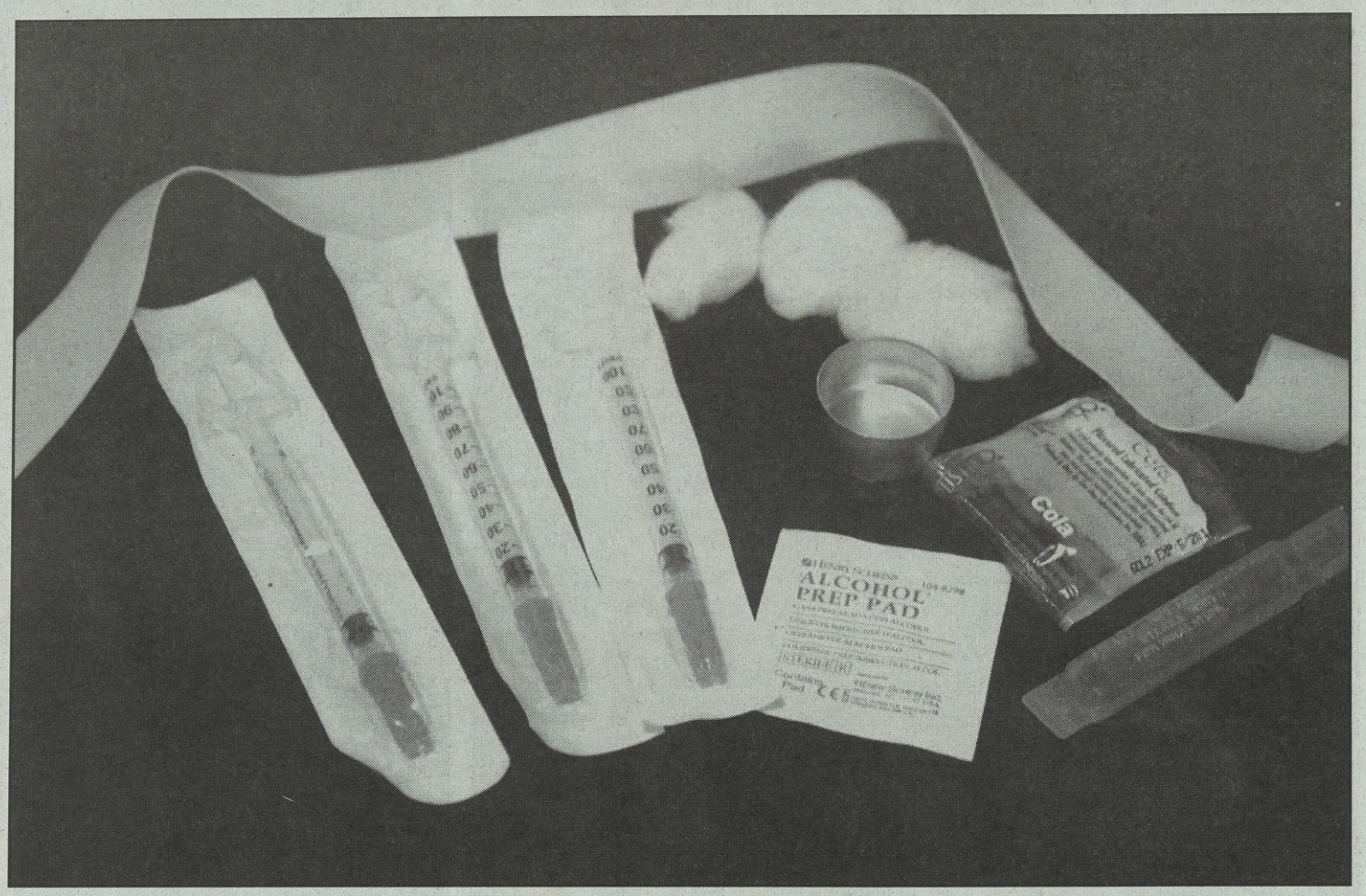
It seems fitting that he often finds his "canvases" on the street. "My art studio is the street," Kennedy explained. "I paint on bed sheets that I hang on wooden fences and building walls."

Today, Kennedy uses a variety of

See **Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy** *page 12*

Needle Exchange Is the Solution, Not the Problem

by Steve Pleich, Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project



The contents of a typical needle exchange kit.

Photo credit: Todd Huffman

There has been much discussion over the last several months concerning the wisdom of having a fully functional needle exchange program in Santa Cruz. Many have expressed doubts about the public health benefits of such a program, but a clear-eyed and dispassionate analysis of those benefits has been subsumed by an overriding public safety concern.

That concern is primarily based upon the belief that a proliferation of discarded contaminated syringes or "needle litter" constitutes a real and present threat to the public health and welfare of our community. I think we can all agree that we don't want discarded needles turning up on our beaches or in our parks and playgrounds. And surely, no one can dispute that even one accidental needle stick is one too many.

But, in my opinion, a well-run and efficient needle exchange program would not only serve the interest of public health, it would also effectively reduce the number of used syringes that are present in public spaces. Although it may seem counterintuitive at first blush, I submit that the best way to reduce needle litter is to prevent it at the source. Needle exchange is not the cause of needle litter. It is the solution.

Syringe exchange programs, or as they are more commonly known, Syringe Services Programs, operate with the primary goal of providing injection drug users with new, sterile injection equipment as a means of reducing the spread of bloodborne viruses and injection-related infections. But, perhaps just as importantly, Syringe Services Programs increasingly have placed emphasis on simultaneously removing used injection equipment from *circulation through a process of exchanging old syringes for new ones.*

In my view, both are valid and essential goals. I have long advocated for a needle litter abatement program which could track the distribution of clean syringes and incentivize the collection of used, contaminated needles. This is both possible and practical and is lacking only the commitment by public officials to directly address the concerns of our community.

Many members of our community doubt the veracity of studies that show a decrease in the infection rate among injection drug users as a direct result of Syringe Services Programs and I will not debate that point here. However, widely accepted studies show the presence of a Syringe Services Program is associated with a sharp decrease in improperly discarded syringes and that is the salient point that this article is intended to address.

A 2011 study compared syringe disposal practices in San Francisco, a city that has a Syringe Service Program, to Miami, a city that does not. This study found that in Miami, 95 percent of syringes were inappropriately discarded as compared to San Francisco, where they *found 13 percent of syringes inappropriately discarded.*

In Santa Cruz, the numbers are even more compelling. The Syringe Services Program now being operated by the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency reports that they are distributing approximately 10,000 syringes per month. Add to that the 5,000 per month distributed through local pharmacies and the overall number of syringes distributed in Santa Cruz County over a 12-month period would be 180,000.

Volunteer clean-up efforts which track the number of needles found in public spaces report that they have found about 2,000 discarded needles in that same period. That means that our rate of inappropriately discarded syringes in 1.1 percent. This is significantly lower than San Francisco.

Now consider this: During the period of its operation, Santa Cruz Syringe Access, the all-volunteer needle exchange run by Street Outreach Supporters (SOS), estimated that fewer than 0.5 percent of all syringes that it distributed were inappropriately discarded. That's right. One half of one percent. Why? Because responsible needle collection was as important to their mission as the public health benefits of providing clean syringes.

In fact, the closure of the SOS syringe exchange sites at Barson and Bixby and at the Emeline Complex did not lessen the amount of injection drug use in that part of Santa Cruz, but it did remove one of the only places where sharps could be properly disposed of. The unintended consequence of this closure was that there are now more improperly discarded syringes in public spaces, not less.

Street Outreach Supporters volunteers were trained community health outreach workers who collected used needles in biohazard containers and took away the equivalent of an oil drum filled with used needles every week for disposal.

SOS provided a life-saving service to the Santa Cruz community by working to improve the health and wellness of drug users, while simultaneously ensuring that syringes were properly disposed of and did not pose a health risk to the community.

I will leave you with one final statistic. During the years that the Satellite Exchange Program was operated by the Santa Cruz AIDS Project, it distributed 320,000 syringes per year. Yet, because they were efficient, professional and responsible and operated several different exchange sites in Santa Cruz, including sites in the urban core, there were no reported instances of significant needle litter during any of their years of operation.

This leaves us as a community with one inescapable conclusion: Needle exchange is not the problem. In fact, it is the solution.

Steve Pleich was a founding member of Santa Cruz Syringe Access, a member of Street Outreach Supporters and is currently the Director of the Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project.

Bullying the Down and Out Is a Deeply Rooted Impulse

by Jack Bragen

As a published writer, people might assume that I have money. This is not so. Writing doesn't pay very much, and because of this, my wife and I need to collect disability insurance and SSI. If I could work a nine-to-five job, I would be doing just that. However, I don't qualify for much, and most of the jobs for which I do qualify are precluded by my slowness and lack of stamina, caused by several decades of being on heavy medication.

The money provided on SSI doesn't go as far as it once did. For one thing, my wife and I are docked a hundred dollars each for being married. Second, the prices of basic necessities have skyrocketed. Third, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, when in office, cut our SSI benefits.

Thus, my wife and I recently decided to seek free food from a church, which is something we used to do but had not needed to do in a while. We were pleasantly surprised. The volunteers giving out food were very kind in attitude and action.

An advance phone call gave us an idea of where to go for the food. The recipients of the food, some of whom appeared fairly well-dressed and well-maintained, and some of whom seemed worse off, were very considerate and made no trouble.

The food will come in handy for us. We got two loaves of bread, a bagful of fresh fruits and vegetables, a jar of peanut butter, a box of cereal, a box of dry pasta and canned food. They also gave us a voucher for more food at Safeway. We will be allowed to go back to the church for more food next month.

When someone is homeless or down and out, they become a target for abuse. Bullying in society often is directed at people who have suffered misfortune.

When my wife and I drive through downtown Walnut Creek while going to an appointment, we see the merriment of the affluent, who can afford to go out to some very expensive restaurants. Thus, we see both ends of the spectrum. I am more comfortable with those at the bottom, as they are unassuming and not narcissistic.

Poor people seem to understand what it is to suffer. This fact tends to make someone a lot less arrogant. I was once an arrogant person, and reaped misfortune because of this. I have finally learned that people's good will is a valuable commodity.

People in our society too easily judge and vilify others, and often are cruelly unfair when someone is identified as a target for people's moral scorn. Everybody joins in and there is a collective throwing of stones which occurs on many levels. How often are people not truly guilty of a crime, when the public has made up its mind that such a person is evil incarnate?

The bullying impulse is deeply ingrained, and will reveal itself when people believe it is socially acceptable to hate because others are participating. Yet, this doesn't make it acceptable to attack and demonize our fellow human beings.

When someone is homeless or down and out, they become a target for many people's abuse, partly because people believe that there will be no retribution or punishment, and perhaps because the individual is often too helpless to fight back. Bullying in society often is directed at people who have suffered misfortune.

Some policemen, who are paid with people's tax dollars to "protect and serve," will gang up on a homeless person. I have seen two police officers approaching an apparently homeless and frail-looking man, as they were getting ready to use a pain-inflicting hold on the man.

In what we now consider to be the Dark Ages, public executions were a form of entertainment. There is substance to the biblical passage in which Jesus said that only he who is without sin should cast the first stone. People ought to focus on their own rights and wrongs first, before calling another person immoral.

Jimmy Lee's Blues

He felt he'd let her down. She was so right, he'd been on the street too long. He needed to talk to her and all he could do was curse at the wind.

Short story by George Wynn

Cold snap! Jimmy Lee was wrapped tightly in his blankets near Mission Bay Library. Suddenly, strong hands begin shaking him. "You OK?" the voice asks.

Jimmy Lee looks into the face of a big SFPD cop and gives an angelic smile, then nods twice. The big cop hurries off to his cruiser, probably to check up on other poor souls freezing their asses off in one of America's premier tourist meccas. Jimmy Lee closes his eyes, then coughs and pulls out a lozenge and swallows.

It's dawn. His box of blueberry muffins lays in crumbs before him. "Damn, wish Harry hadn't lost his place." Eight days a month, Jimmy Lee was good to sleep in Harry's SRO hotel room. According to the rules of the Tenderloin residential hotel, a resident could have a guest sleep over eight nights a month.

Jimmy had kept telling Harry to clean up the enormous clutter in his room, but Harry paid no mind to him, nor the management. Now he had paid the price and had disappeared.

They had met years ago while cooking in a downtown greasy spoon, six months after Jimmy Lee was discharged from the Air Force for a nervous breakdown after serving a year. Authoritarian figures made him unbearably tense and confused.

After his discharge, his tough Texas father berated him: "You just couldn't measure up. You were always a mama's boy."

Jimmy Lee had wanted to knock his father unconscious at that moment, but instead ran off to a park and bawled his eyes out. He so much missed his Hong Kong-born, gentle mother who was killed while crossing a green light by a hit-and-run driver in Houston's Chinatown, where Jimmy had grown up.

How could she have married such a beast as his father? But she'd entered the country illegally and his father took full advantage, bossing her around and from time to time even smacking her and him.

Fed up with those confrontations, Jimmy Lee vowed never again to see his father and hitched a ride to Tucson, where he volunteered four hours a day cutting cheese in the hip downtown Co-op. As a reward, he ate all the cheese and bread he could digest.

He slept on the street — a breeze, since it was often 70 degrees at midnight in Arizona. Unable to find full-time work, he moved on to Phoenix and got a job digging ditches until the super-hot summer weather hit and he caught a Greyhound to San Francisco.

Jimmy Lee, wiry, an inch or two over six feet tall, with long arms down to his knees, now rubs his arm over his eyes, stands up and lights an American Spirit. He doesn't smoke much. A pack lasts him a month. He throws down the cigarette and mashes it with his work boot.

Going to be tough without Harry's place, he thought. Last night, he slept in a SOMA grocery doorway with a sign in the window saying, "*Please Don't Sleep In Doorway*." The stocky Mediterranean grocer screamed at him in the morning, "Get away. Never come back!"

After his discharge from the Air Force, things went well in the beginning. He had somehow willed himself to prove he was somebody, but then the old anxieties and insecurities came back in Fog City.

Luckily, he was referred to an elderly therapist. White-haired Stefa was tall and slender, with an oblong face and small but intense eyes. Her small office was near Duboce Park and many of her bright watercolors were hanging on the wall.

She was Polish-American, and came from Old Town Chicago, where she used to saunter down to Michigan Avenue to chat with Studs Terkel in his bookstore. Stefa gave a sweet smile when she told Jimmy Lee, "Studs was the friendliest and smartest man I ever met."

Stefa was on the verge of retirement, and in a barter deal, asked Jimmy Lee to buy her a paperback of his choice for the price of seeing her.

"Why are you being so kind to me?" he asked.

She leaned over slightly and stared deeply into his eyes, "Because you're in deep need of a friend.''

Jimmy Lee let out a long, long breath. "You're so right."

He told her how the stresses from his father, the military and life on the street sometimes felt insurmountable and how much he hated bossy people and how sometimes he just didn't know what was the right or wrong thing to do, no matter how hard he tried.

In a serious tone, Stefa said, "I know this will really sound hard to you, Jimmy Lee, but you have to somehow learn and be prepared to handle any eventuality that life presents you!'' She paused and leaned over and put her hands over his in a caring way and added, "Especially in your precarious situation on and off the street, which I gather is mostly on."

Sadly, a coronary ended her life on the F line near the Ferry Building only months after Jimmy Lee began seeing her. He felt low and angry at the loss. She'd believed in him, always telling him, "Remember your strength, Jimmy Lee."

Jimmy Lee rarely did shelters, but one night, it was a real soaker. In the shelter near the doorway, an Oklahoma tough was making fun of an elderly, bent-over, leather-faced Cherokee Indian.

Oklahoma tough spits on the floor, "I grew up around your dumb, liquored-up kind. What the hell you doing out here? You old fool!"

"Leave him alone," Jimmy Lee shouted.

"Says who?" shouts back the instigator.

"Says me," Jimmy Lee responds firmly. Oklahoma tough lunges with a right hook that Jimmy blocks. Then he heaves the instigator against the wall, grabbing him by the lapels and putting a fist at the brink of his nose.

Suddenly, a burly staff member rushes over and pulls Jimmy Lee off the tough, who screams, "He hit me!"

Jimmy Lee shouts, "It didn't happen that way. He was abusing..."

The burly staff guy cuts him off, saying, "I want you out of here now!"

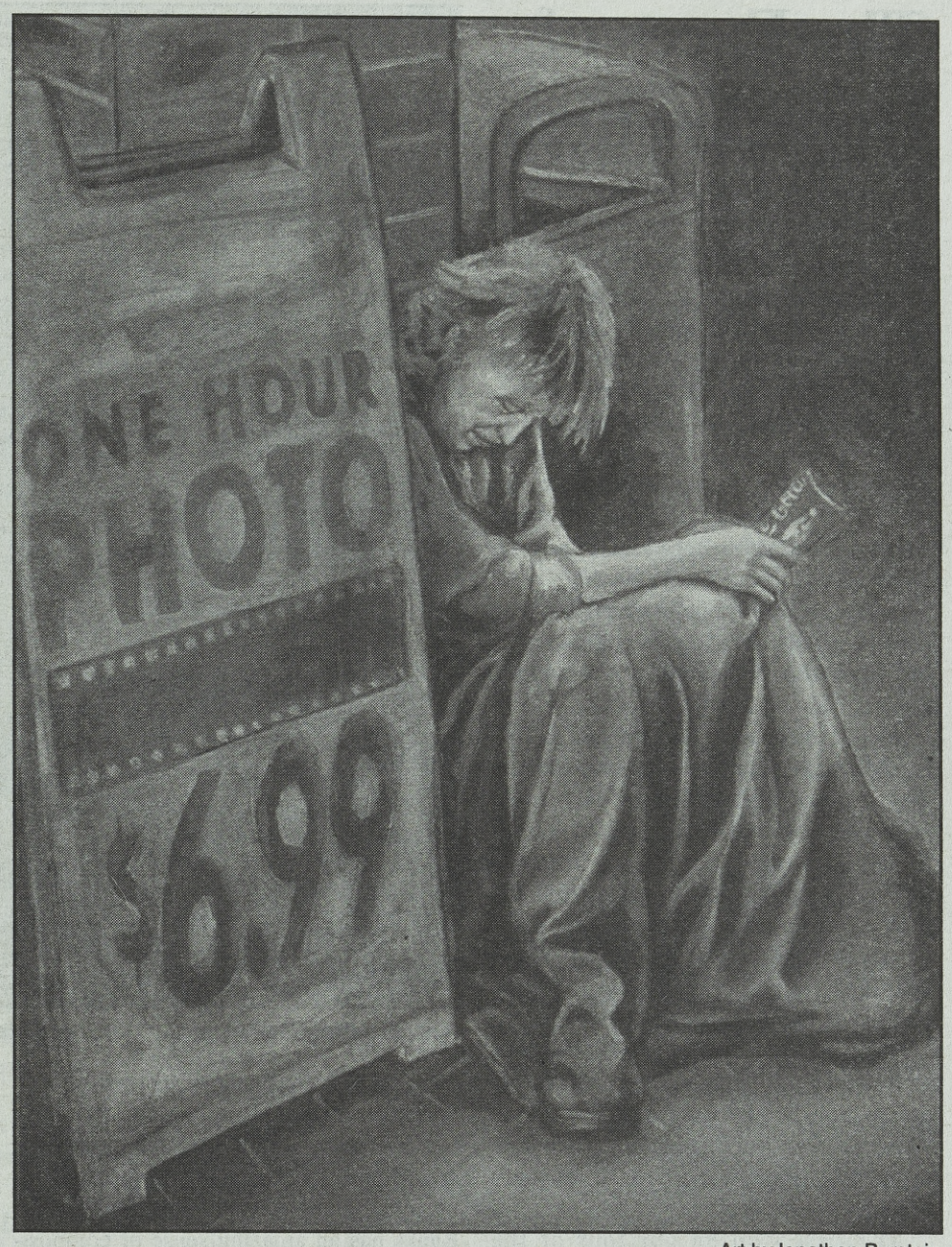
Jimmy Lee sighs, "But, but, but..."

The burly guy shakes his head, then shrugs his shoulders. "Ain't no buts about it. Get on your way."

Jimmy packs his stuff and the Cherokee Indian slaps him on the back as he's walking out. "Sorry, I'm really sorry. You're a good man."

Jimmy nods and shakes the old man's warm, firm hand and steps out into the pouring rain.

The rain abates some by the time he settles in for the night in an alleyway by the Christian Science Church near Ellis Street. Comfortably wrapped in blankets, Jimmy Lee sips hot tea in a cup from his thermos, then screws the top onto his thermos bottle and falls asleep.



Art byJonathan Burstein

Jimmy Lee remembers Stefa telling him that people were meant to sleep indoors and urging him to find a way to get off the street.

At first, he thinks he's dreaming, then the unmistakable feel of hands rifling through his pockets. He awakens with a start and suddenly he's being struck. Pow! Pow! He tastes his own blood on his lip and in his mouth. "Ah, ah, ah," he sighs, enduring the pain as his nose is shattered.

Two thugs, one big-bellied, the other slim, take turns messing up his face before Jimmy Lee reaches inside his coat and lashes out with an aerosol container and sprays them in the face.

Tearing at his eyes, Big Belly screams, "That damn chink got me," followed by Slim's cry, "That bastard got me too."

Both men run off and Jimmy Lee makes his way to San Francisco General to fix his broken nose and some damage to his jaw.

The next day, he heads out to Sigmund Stern Grove and Pine Lake to get some peace and quiet. He desperately needs to get away from the urban jungle. Although the mosquitoes almost eat him alive, he spends a month there just enjoying the solitude.

In the late morning, Jimmy Lee reads Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Less Traveled." He doesn't read much, but he's always liked Robert Frost, ever since grade school. For breakfast, he tastes WASA rye crackers followed by a big piece of Monterey Jack cheese. Then he catches the L car to Church Station and walks around Duboce Park and passes by Stefa's old office. He stares at the second-floor window to catch some whiffs of her generous spirit.

It feels weird being close to downtown again. He hasn't been in town for a full month. Jimmy Lee lays down, staring at the sky and trying to figure things out. He remembers Stefa telling him that people were meant to sleep indoors and urging him to find a way to get off the street.

By evening, he slowly makes his way toward ATT Park where he plans to spend the night. Close to his destination, Jimmy Lee rounds the corner and hears screams from the other end of the street. It's a familiar voice.

"You bastards!" someone screams at the top of his lungs. It's Harry.

"Shit, he's only got 35 dollars," one of the two well-built thieves shouts. Then another punch lands, and Harry screams again.

Jimmy Lee makes a move in the direction of Harry, then suddenly freezes. The image of his recent beating flashes before his eyes and his heart begins to pound. He doesn't think he has the nerve to help Harry. Terrified, shriveled up, he turns and runs toward a Mission Bay creek, crying to himself, "I'm a damn coward. Damn it, my old man was right."

Jimmy wanted to believe in the inner core of humanity that Stefa talked about, but his reality wouldn't allow it. He cries again, just as he did when he was a kid living with his father and used to hear his old man's voice telling him, "You were always a mama's boy! You gutless wonder!"

All his life, Jimmy Lee had tried to prove the old man wrong and now the old man was proven right. He breaks off some blades of grass and chews them. He slaps the sides of his head, saying, "Get hold of yourself, Jimmy Lee!"

He keeps repeating that to himself. He lights up an American Spirit, takes a few drags, shakes his head, then takes another few drags, before crushing the cigarette butt with his boot.

He wants to see Stefa so bad. She'd always been so understanding and made him feel like somebody of worth. Most everybody else except his mother and Stefa had called him a loser.

She'd touched his life in a special way. He felt he'd let her down. She was so right, he'd been on the street too long. He needed to talk to her and all he could do was curse at the wind.

The Faces of Homelessness

from page 2

not as homeless," Flohr said.

Expressions Gallery paired up with St. Mary's and BOSS to identify artists who are homeless and also to find places where they could work and develop their art. St. Mary's and BOSS worked to encourage homeless artists, and to provide some art supplies and a space to work.

"To our amazement, we found 21 artists who are in this show," she said. "There are 60 artists in total, but 21 of them were homeless, or are homeless or have been homeless. But they shouldn't be known as homeless. They should be known as artists because their work is amazing."

Flohr's work as curator of this exhibit is also amazing, because she is one of the very few art gallery directors who would have even bothered to talk with or look at the art of homeless people in the first place, let alone be so concerned at the lack of community support for their artistry that she curated a beautiful exhibit that filled her gallery from floor to ceiling with art on the theme of homelessness.

At a time when many business owners in Berkeley are lobbying city officials to banish homeless people from view, Rinna Flohr has welcomed homeless artists into her gallery, and has provided a sanctuary for homeless artwork.

The first stop on our tour of the Homelessness exhibit was at the paintings of Gregory William Rick, a muralist and painter who served in the Army from 2003 to 2007 and was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Upon his return home, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He tried to get *help at the VA, but he went months and months waiting for help and couldn't hold* a job because he was disturbed.

Rick had planned to return to the house where he had grown up to live with his mother, but he found that his mother had died while he was in the Army, and the house was put up for sale because there had been no one to pay the mortgage.

As a result of all these setbacks, Rick became homeless. Last year, he got back on his feet and began painting again. According to Flohr, he said his artwork was what "kept him sane, kept him focused and kept him feeling that there was hope in the world."

Next, we looked at Roosevelt Washington's wonderfully expressive art. His beautifully rendered painting of a homeless man quietly enjoying a take-out meal on a park bench is entitled simply, "A Man Having a Pleasant Meal."

Flohr said that Washington is "such a fantastic artist and such a sweet guy."

Washington grew up in poverty and was raised in Oakland by a single mother with six children. He was allowed to graduate from high school even though he didn't learn reading, writing or arithmetic.

After graduation, he was not able to read a job application, and couldn't find a job, and then became homeless. Recently, Washington was diagnosed with dyslexia, and finally was taught how to read and write in his late thirties. Nobody had ever diagnosed his dyslexia during all the years he spent in public school.

" He does amazing work," said Flohr. "He's an amazing guy and we're really happy to present his work."

Next, we viewed a painting of a homeless person's face reflected in a restaurant window, a haunting reminder of hunger in the midst of carefree affluence and gourmet restaurants. Flohr pointed out that the disquieting contrast between wealth and poverty was the theme of this painting and several other artworks.



Artist Rodney Bell from St. Mary's Center had his artwork, "Homelessness Has Faces," displayed at Expressions Gallery.

Tiphereth Banks, a young artist who has worked at Youth Spirit Artworks, contributed an exquisitely designed painting of a young woman cradling her dog. Banks has an amazing sense of composition, and her painting reveals the emotional closeness and heartfelt affection between the woman and her dog by portraying them as almost merging into one another in a face-to-face embrace.

Flohr said, "Tiphereth makes the point that pets are very important to homeless people. It's the love of their life. It's the one thing that they feel is loyal to them and is truthful and is really there for them. Yet if people see homeless people with pets, they take them away and put them in shelters. And that's taking away a really huge part of their lives. It's like taking a child away from a parent."

While discussing another painting of the bond between a homeless man and his dog, Flohr told us of an incident that opened her eyes to the importance of companion animals in the lives of homeless people.

"There was this gentleman who was standing on the street corner," Flohr said. "He was very emaciated and very thirsty-looking. One of the artists came by and she had a bottle of water and she said, 'Here, it looks like you really need this.'

"The first thing he did was give the water to his dog. She couldn't understand why he would do that since he needed it himself. So she went and got another bottle and gave it to him. You could tell from that how pets are very meaningful to people."

At this point in the tour, I was impressed by Flohr's sensitive awareness of what homeless people go through in our society. In the course of explaining a painting of a homeless man reflected in the windows of the Bank of America, Flohr described the unjust economic gap between the rich and the poor in our country.

While it was heartening to hear an art gallery director speak out about economic inequality, her revealing insights into the hopes and hardships faced by homeless people went far deeper than that.

In the course of explaining an artist's depiction of a single-room-occupancy hotel room, Flohr offered an acutely insightful explanation of what people are subjected to when living in a slum hotel.

Bear in mind that for many homeless service providers, an SRO hotel room is considered the golden passport to a better life. Often, the hope of someday being placed in a cramped, rundown hotel room is held over the heads of homeless clients to make them jump through the hoops and obey the seemingly endless regulations of nonprofit agencies. Homeless people often question whether service providers have any first-hand knowledge of how miserable conditions usually are in slum hotels.

This is a point that few people other than the most experienced homeless advocates even understand, but count Rinna Flohr among that number. She honestly described why so many homeless people regard these kinds of housing placements as a trap — a degrading bargain in which they are supposed to gratefully trade away their freedom and human dignity for the opportunity to pay all their income to a slumlord for a wretched little room that feels more like a jail cell than a home.

Flohr could easily have limited her comments to an artistic appraisal of the painting, with perhaps a vague statement of sympathy. Instead, she deplored the injustice of this situation with real depth and genuine concern.

"This is a woman who was homeless for quite awhile, living outside, and finally got a single room occupancy unit," Flohr said. "She was put in this room and she realized, 'My God, I can't stand it. There is nothing in this room that I would choose for myself. I don't own anything in this room. It's a tiny little room and I can't bring any friends into it. The mattress is dirty. And I have to follow all these rules. I have to turn out the lights by 9 o'clock. I have to do this. I have to do that.

"So basically she said, 'You know, sometimes it's better to be free and out in the streets than it is to be stuck.'"

This poses a crucial question about whether service providers and government officials should be content with offering homeless people a low-rent room in a slum hotel, rather than a real home.

So I asked that very question of Rinna Flohr. "The question is, are we offering people freedom or a cage?"

Flohr answered without hesitation. Pointing to the SRO room depicted in the artwork, she said, "That's a cage — treating them like animals. I think we need to think about this when we're offering people spaces. We need to think about what we are offering them. Are we offering them freedom? That's what people need. They need freedom and protection. We need to rethink the way we offer help."

The Homelessness exhibit runs until April 18 at Expressions Gallery, 2035 Ashby Avenue, less than a block from Ashby BART station. Expressions Gallery is a community art center that holds classes and events as well as a gallery of fine artworks. Phone: 510-644-4930. Visit their website at www.expressionsgallery.org

Whitman in the Tenderloin

by George Wynn

What would it be like
to sit down with him
— a big dude —
in 49er red and gold
sitting on a milk crate
with boom box blastin'
classic Wicked Pickett:
"I'm gonna take you girl
and hold you,
And do all the things I told you
in the Midnight Hour."

And the menfolk and
the womenfolk flirt
to the music while others
curse and flirt with the
game of cocaine

Then the police siren
the cruiser stops and
the men in blue with
their long black nightsticks
watch the crowd disperse
and look up at the windows
of antique Tenderloin buildings
and the puzzled faces of Asian
grandmothers and grandfathers
more than likely survivors
of refugee camps
holding their crying babies and
perhaps thinking we never dreamed
our new home would be like this

One block down the street
I spot a slender young man
laying against a wall with
blue felt hat and long
black hair halfway down his back
and brown tanned Indian land skin
he's centered: piercing eyes
and tender lips his fingertips
highlighting his tome of choice:
Leaves of Grass
"Great book" I say and he
looks up and presses my
hand with his in a firm handshake
and continues to read.

The Walkers

by Peter Marin

This poem follows the journey of a small group of homeless men and women as they marched across America from Santa Barbara to Washington, D.C.

No one
when we set out
not even we believed
we'd make it —
thirteen of us
from Santa Barbara
King's birthday
clouds low on the horizon
the rainy season beginning
trucks on the highway
step by step down the road.
3000 miles one coast to the other
10 months across 2 dozen states

I still remember the feel
of the sun on my face
the hot nights in the midwest
where we bathed at dusk in
farm-ponds. I remember the
bridge over the Mississippi
the storms in Ohio
the leaves underfoot in the east.
I remember the wide turnpikes
narrow roads
how the air thru which we passed
scoured us until we glowed.
I remember how as we climbed
in New Mexico toward the
Continental Divide
the light of the sun came thru
the clouds lighting
first one part then another
of the plain we crossed
rising at its furthest edge

But we too no less than the monks felt in ourselves something holy. We too heard in the beat of our hearts struggling uphill the sound of the world: *boom. boom. boom.*

to jagged peaks.
At the top of a high pass
rain soaked us
hail bounced at our feet
solitude enveloped us
muting the sounds of the world.
A clarity of light surrounded us
as if we had come suddenly close
to something other than
ourselves.

Later at night
our bickering began again —
the drunken arguments
over money or women or
which roads to take.
But what did it matter?
We slept knowing we had
for a moment
entered another world —
the one we dreamt as children
must be there.

Along the way
we picked up cans sold blood
ate so much surplus cheese
we could not shit for days.
By night we saw flares of gas
by day sight of cities guided us.
In the street people stopped us
tears in their eyes
pressing change in our hands
or lifting in the air V'd fingers
or fists to spur us on.

Men joined us crazed by war
lovers star-crossed
children sent packing
parents abandoned
the poor made homeless when
police tore down their tents
or stamped their fires out.
We saw men arrested for
sleeping on riverbanks
women for wheeling a
shopping cart down the street.
By the light of our fires we
heard men speak of lost children
or the pain of exile
with no hope of return.
In sleep they cried out to us
as do those shipwrecked
driven wild by thirst
who see on the horizon
imagined rescuers.

In huge shelters in great cities
we saw 1000 paupers in unison
turning on cots
like meat on a spit
snow falling outside.
I can recite
culled from our travels
a litany of horrors
a geography of loss.
The grieved faces melt into one
the cities combine skies
become a single huge roof
above a chamber of sorrows
stretching from sea to shining sea.

Ask me now why we did it and
I have no answer. It was not for
housing tho' we spoke of it.
Nor was it for charity
tho' we received it.
Nor was it even for justice —
at least not for ourselves.
We began that is all and
before we began
we were nothing.
It was only a dream
a thing we said idly we'd do.
And then we were there
on the road no turning back
only ourselves to measure
failure or success.
I believe now we crossed
not only the country
but a far region inside where
the soul has its home.
The tall mountains wide plains
were parts of ourselves
discovered in the great
blanketing silences of the land.

I am as you see
still on the streets
no wiser
no more sober than before.
And yet — I tell you I am
not the same.
I once saw in New York
Buddhist monks walk for peace
in stately order solemnly
beating drums:
boom. boom. boom.
They walked as if in
a slow-motion funeral:
boom. boom. boom.
It was like the beating
heart of the world
and when later I heard
they had walked
across the whole nation
in the same way
I cried.

On our walk
we had no drums
we shambled signs on our backs
shopping cart pushed ahead
an American flag held aloft.
No doubt we were comic
or sad in the eyes of
drivers who whizzed by
our brown shabby junk-laden
bus lumbering behind us.
But we too no less than
the monks felt in ourselves
something holy.
We too heard in the beat of
our hearts struggling uphill
the sound of the world:
boom. boom. boom.

Now in my thoughts I dance
as the wind devils did in Texas
I ride the high clouds
as I once rode freights
and I step among stars
like a man crossing a stream
stone to stone without stumbling.
But who will believe it
seeing me familiar on the street
my palm out
a bottle in my hand?
I am on fire with the truth
behind the mask of my face
and yet
mute, mute, mute,
I cannot tell my tale.

Berkeley Public Housing Sold to Billionaires

from page 5

a Section 8 housing voucher and moved because the stress was so horrible living at the public housing project once they started to pressure tenants out of their public housing units. The stress caused major health problems for me. Many others were pressured out of their housing also, and someone needs to look into what has happened to us."

It was reported in 2010 that Jorge M. Perez owned 75 percent of The Related Companies, and that billionaire Stephen M. Ross, a 95 percent owner of the Miami Dolphins football franchise, owned 25 percent of the development company.

The billionaires who targeted Berkeley public housing dfor privatization evidently have political connections to the White House. Jorge M. Perez has been a major political fundraiser for President Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton, and was an advisor to ex-President Bill Clinton during his term in office.

Perez and Ross also have been involved in a major project to privatize many of Oakland's public housing units in partnership with the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) and the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC), a local nonprofit housing developer. As a direct result of the partnership, in recent years the Oakland Coliseum Gardens public housing units were demolished, 178 low-income families were displaced from their homes, and the newly rehabilitated project near the Coliseum BART station in East Oakland is now called Lion Creek Crossings.

To give an idea about the way that EBALDC feels about low-income public housing tenants, the EBALDC website currently refers to the old Coliseum Gardens public housing complex as the "notorious" 1964 OHA public housing development, when describing how nice the newer Lion Creek Crossings privatized rental housing project is.

However, the website fails to mention that a 15-year-old girl was shot and killed in late December of 2012 at Lion Creek Crossings, along with a 14-year-old boy who was also shot during that same incident, and that 15-year-old Hadari Askari was gunned down at the same housing complex on July 10, 2012.

Elsie Smith said, "I was a public housing tenant for 14 years and moved out of there around two years ago when they offered me a Section 8 housing choice voucher and told me that they wanted to sell my housing. They put a lot of pressure on us to get out of there. I am lucky, because things turned out all right for me. However, it did not turn out so well for others that did not want to move out of their longtime public housing."

Eleanor Walden, a former Berkeley Rent Board Commissioner, said, "I have heard of problems with elderly people being given a notice of two days to get out of their housing lately. Berkeley used to be a moral island that was better than many other places, but now it is no better than cities in Mississippi. We put people on the streets, and there is no morality here anymore. We sit back and wait for the axe to fall, and fear that our lives will be eroded and demeaned by people that throw a lot of money around, and displace us in the process.

"I am horrified by what is going on and do not know what we can do about it. It is inhumane and it is a bad situation for the poor in Berkeley. It is an injustice to the low-income families in Berkeley who face displacement because their public housing has been sold to some billionaires."

According to released documents, rents have been collected from Berkeley's former public housing tenants with an appropriate proration forwarded to Berkeley 75, LP, the new ownership entity. On February 20, the BHA delivered the first list of potential renters to Berkeley 75, LP, for the newly privatized, federally subsidized project-based units.

Berkeley 75, LP, is currently screening the first group of applicants for suitability as tenants at the to-be-rehabilitated 75 units. The potential tenants face a stiff double examination before being allowed entry into the former public housing units as new tenants, and have to be cleared by both Related and the BHA.

Once the privatized units are rehabilitated and inspected, and the new tenants are chosen with new contracts signed, the BHA will start earning as little as $75 per month per unit in administration fees from the privatized public housing units sold to the out-of-state billionaires.

Jorge M. Perez is known as the "Condo King" of Miami, Florida, because he has developed and owns so many condominiums in that region through The Related Companies/Related Group.

Public records reveal that the out-of-state billionaires got a sweet deal in their efforts to grab Berkeley's public housing units from the poor. It cost The Related Company around $35 million to buy Berkeley's 75 public housing units, at a cost that works out to around $99 per square foot, even though the median price of housing in Berkeley is currently going for about $454 per square foot.

Public records also reveal that the City of Berkeley loaned the Related Companies of California $400,000 in predevelopment costs to fund some of the work associated with the disposition and rehabilitation of the BHA housing units. However, the $400,000 loan was later converted to a grant that left the taxpayers holding the bag.

On March 13, BHA Commissioners also voted to pay an additional $23,241 in consultant fees to EJP/Praxis consultants, even though the deal is done and the public housing units have already been sold. Also, it appears that during the past three years, the BHA paid EJP/Praxis consultants as much as $98,711 for their assistance in privatizing and selling Berkeley's public housing units. Consulting fees to EJP/Praxis were originally expected to be as little as $37,000, but costs shot up to almost $100,000.

Documents also reveal that on May 12, 2011, BHA Commissioners voted to pay Overland, Pacific and Cutler $147,000 to relocate tenants from their public housing units, and these amounts do not reflect the full costs of legal expenses and other costs associated with privatizing Berkeley's 75 public housing units.

Budget cuts to HUD's federal housing programs may eventually result in higher rents for new tenants moving into privatized former public housing units in Berkeley.

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released in early March 2014 reveals that the massive sequestration budget cuts have savaged our nation's federally subsidized housing programs, including the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

In total, according to the GAO report, HUD estimates that, due to sequestration funding cuts, Public Housing Authorities provided rental assistance payments to 42,000 fewer low-income households during 2013. HUD also estimates that sequestration funding cuts to Homeless Assistance Grants will lead to states and localities removing as many as 60,000 formerly homeless persons from housing and emergency shelter programs all across the nation, placing them at risk of ending up back onto the streets.

Sequestration cuts also reduced funding for HUD's project-based housing assistance, through which HUD makes payments to owners of multifamily rental housing units on behalf of 1.2 million low and very low-income families. Funding to renew contracts for this program decreased from $9 billion to $8.6 billion.

No one could be reached at the Berkeley Housing Authority for comment at the time this story was published.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

Visionary Art of Leon Kennedy

from page 7

materials for a canvas: bed sheets he has found on the streets, pieces of cloth, canvas, wooden boards, even tables and chairs. Many of the materials he works with come from the East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse in Oakland. He creates his artworks with markers, paints, crayons, beads, glitter, cotton, yarn and rope.

At times, Kennedy's use of recycled materials and found objects from the streets seems deeply symbolic.

In describing his painting, "Fellowship with One Another," Carol Johnson and Catherine Fisher of St. Mary's Center wrote, "Leon Kennedy paints on bed sheets to remind us of those without them. Aware of how it feels to be alone, his journey and artistic talent depicts the power of realizing we matter. He captures what we believe — our humanity is wrapped up in each other."

Kennedy paints nearly every day, often working on a bed sheet or a huge piece of cloth spread out on the floor of his studio apartment. He paints while kneeling, as if immersed in prayer. He explains that artistic visions constantly come to him.

Destiny in God's Hands

His art often focuses on the eyes and hands. He describes the eyes as the windows of the soul. And many of his paintings show hands lifted up in prayer or reaching out to touch the hands of others.

"The hands are my trademark," he said. "In church, the hands are raised in worship and praise. People take their hands for granted, but they use their hands a lot. If I didn't have my hands, I couldn't do my artwork. Your hands and your imagination work together. If you just had imagination with no hands, you could not express yourself through art."

One of his uniquely imaginative paintings, "Destiny in God's Hands," shows multitudes of hands — a forest of arms — uplifted in prayer and praise.

Because of his beautiful sense of composition, the painting is very compelling, and it conveys the artist's belief that our destiny, our life, and all our possibilities are in God's hands.

Trust God

Kennedy created the painting, "Trust God," as an illustration of a scriptural passage that is very important in his life: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart."

This seemingly simple figure of a solitary woman with uplifted arms holding a staff has an almost indescribable power and grace. In this dramatic image of faith, the woman lifts her arms up to the blue heavens, and almost seems to be lifting up the sun. Her yellow hat is so brightly colored, it seems like she herself is the sunrise.

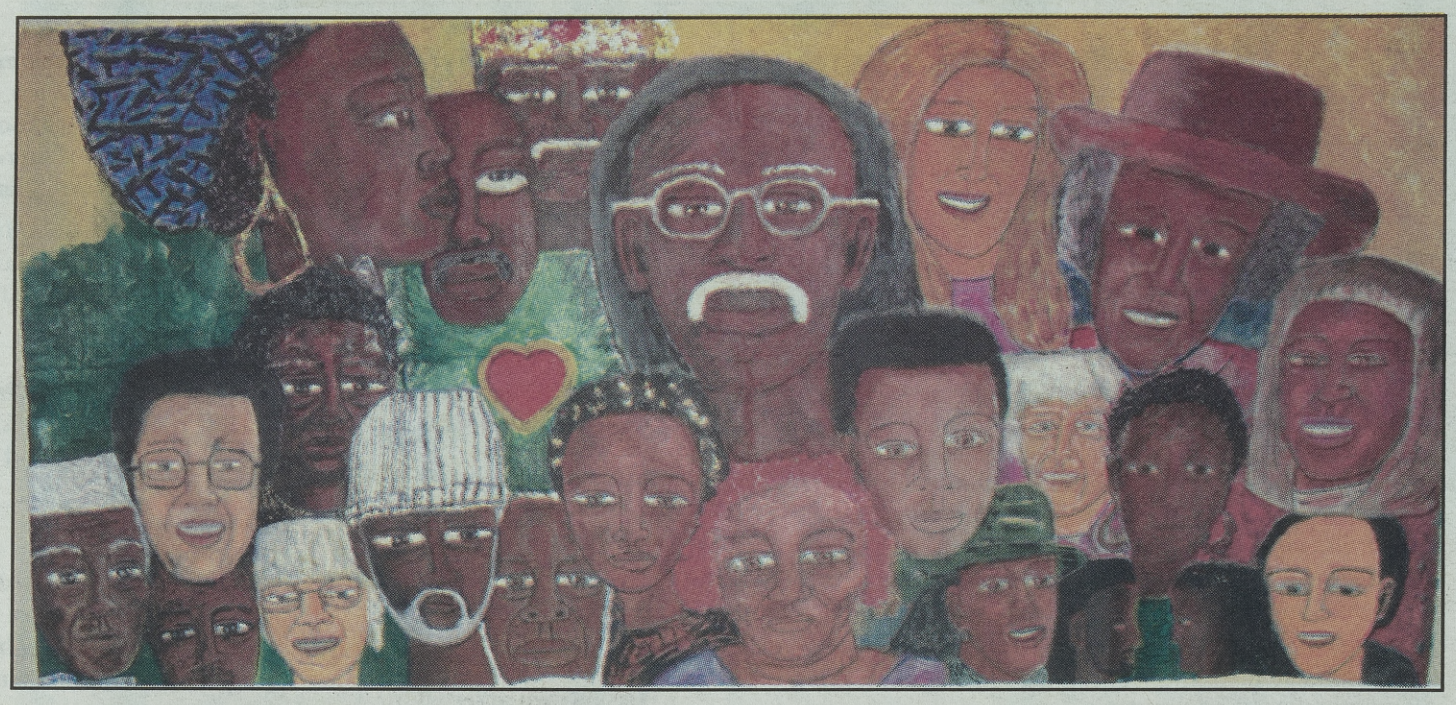
Her staff is reminiscent of *Psalm* 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me."

Praise

"Praise" was created with acrylic paints on a piece of black cloth Kennedy found on the ground. This work is meant to show how "people are all together, united, joined at the moment of praise."

At first glance, the painting seems to depict yellow and red candles or flames but a closer look reveals that the "flames" are actually human figures with their arms uplifted in praise.

The people look like "the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit," Kennedy said. He was envisioning the burning bush that Moses could approach only after taking off his shoes because he was on holy ground. Praise and spiritual fire. "It symbolizes being blessed," Kennedy said.



"Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself." **Leon Kennedy said about this painting: "Love, Faith, and Hope in Community are very important for me. This painting comes from my heart and shows my passion for people. Each one of us is a shining light, a blessing in different ways. Our love for one another makes a better community."**
Left to right, top row: **Aleta Manuel, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Man with crown (symbolizing wisdom), Leon Kennedy, Susan Werner, a Grandmother.** ***Left to right, bottom row:*** **Nelson Mandela, an African brother, Chinese friend, Diana Davis, Sister Mary Nolan, Herbert Cade, Clyde Thomas, Angela Gill, Ella Mae Kennedy (Leon's mother), Face of Hope, Carmen Neal, Carol Johnson, Inner Beauty, Sister Aleta Bradford, Two Faces: Love One Another, Laura Buckley.**

"The main idea of my art is concern for people. We're here to serve and love and encourage one another. When I get a vision, I hope it helps someone."

From Our Heart

In this bright-red vision, two women with heads bowed clasp each other's hands. They create a heart-shaped outline as they join together in giving thanks.

The artist created this compelling image to illustrate his belief: "When we gather in God's name, God is present. In everything, give thanks from our heart."

While looking at this work, Kennedy said, "This art is my calling. It is my life. God gave me this gift to make spiritual art and this love of drawing people."

God don't move my mountain

A familiar spiritual sings: *"Lord don't move my mountain, but give me the strength to climb."*

This visionary painting is one of Leon Kennedy's most beautiful works of art.

"The vision of this image of two men facing one another, in prayer, hands connected, just came to me," Kennedy said.

"After I painted this, I heard a woman at my church sing the old spiritual song, 'God Don't Move My Mountain.' This song is testimony to my own life, it feeds my spirit. I knew 'God Don't Move My Mountain' was the meaning of these men robed in orange and yellow and people standing in praise and prayer. All the people are giving God the glory."

The eye between the two men symbolizes God watching over our life, always present, Kennedy explained.

"In my own life, I know struggle, and I know strength through God," he said. "The mountain is life, and I climb in prayer, anytime and anywhere. I pray through good times and trials and tribulations. When I feel low, I think about how good God is, and I feel love and thank him."

Rather than asking that life's trials and hardships be removed, Leon's painting joins the spiritual song in asking for the strength to climb our own mountain.

Leon Kennedy's art is available for display and sale, at private homes and galleries. Contact Susan Werner, art facilitator at St. Mary's Center, for information about exhibiting and commissioning Leon's art. swerner@stmaryscenter.org, 510-923-9600 ext. 231.



"Here We Are: Praising God and Serving One Another." Art by Leon Kennedy

Praising God and Serving One Another

by Leon Kennedy

In God's eyes, everybody is somebody:
a Shining Star.
Everyone is connected to one another:
One Spirit.

Each person is born with a gift from
God: a calling from the heart
a way of ministering.

Times are stormy and hard for many
of us. Sometimes we wonder,
"How will we make it?"

We need to keep on
praying and praising,
reaching for our dreams,
asking for what we need and want,
knocking until the door opens.

After the storm, the sun always shines.

The stars are always shining, even
when we can not see them.
God has blessings for each one of us,
even when we do not know
how we'll make it.

God is waiting for us . . .
to lift up our hands,
to have faith in God,
to live God's will,
to Love and Bless all people,
and to give God all the glory.

May we hold on to
God's unchanging hands.